Bounds of Security
The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden

NATIONAL INTEGRATION OFFICE
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INTEGRATIONSVERKET
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Sweden has been taking in refugees in close cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for almost half a century. This report considers how those who arrived in the latter part of the 1990s have managed. It is mainly about refugees from the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia and the Al-Tash camp in Iraq. The report is presented in journalistic form and only looks at a limited number of local authorities and refugees. For this reason, many quotas refugees will doubtless have difficulty recognizing themselves and their situations in these pages. The way people get on in their new country and the problems they run into tend to differ considerably from one group of refugees to another, from one recipient country to another and from one period of time to another. There are, however, problems and solutions that apply universally to all countries and all refugee groups. Also, there is a need for an exchange of experience, knowledge and views. This is to take place at an international conference on the reception and integration of resettled refugees in Stockholm on 25-27 April next year. The present report constitutes a part of the preparations for this conference. We trust that it will help improve resettled refugees’ chances of becoming integrated in society and that Sweden will be able to continue its active participation in the international rescue work being performed by the UNHCR in the 21st century.

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Bounds of Security: The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden
Introduction
Protecting the persecuted – is it enough?

The reception of resettled refugees is one of the most strictly-controlled parts of refugee migration to Sweden. Not that Sweden exerts any great influence on where crisis spots develop in the world. We can however decide whereabouts our efforts are needed most. How many people should we take in? And from which parts of the world? The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, is an important adviser and partner in this respect, providing the basic data we need in order to make decisions on the Swedish refugee quota. The Riksdag (Parliament) adopts an annual budget for the resettlement of selected resettled refugees in Sweden. The Government presents the guidelines for how the refugee quota is to be used during the year.

Thus Sweden’s refugee quota reflects the situation in the world. The quotas for the past decade give an idea of the growth and decline in tensions that occurred in various areas – Iraq, Vietnam, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Iran...

The figures, too, indicate which crises chiefly concerned the Swedes as a nation. The last decade began with a quota of 1,222 refugees – a figure that was more than quadrupled in 1994 when war raged in former Yugoslavia. The quietest year of the decade was 1996, with only 600 resettled refugees, mostly from Iraq and Iran.

Sweden’s reception of resettled refugees during this period has been evaluated by the Swedish Immigration Board in a wide-ranging study that was partly based on questionnaires. The study was entitled Status Kvot (‘Status Quota’). Our aim is not to echo the findings of the Immigration Board (now the Migration Board) but to supplement them. The need for a new report has been mooted by refugee case officers around Sweden wishing to alert the National Integration Office to the fact that they have been
The names of the two refugee camps Rafha (picture) and Al-Tash have become household words for many municipal officials.

Facing a radically new work situation since 1996. Many have noted that the resettled refugees who arrived in 1996-1998 have very different needs to previous groups. Others point out that over a short space of time Sweden has taken in some 2,500 people who had been living in refugee camps for between 7 and 17 years.

Not until after the arrival of the refugees in Sweden have municipal reception staff come to realise the human consequences of having to live for years in a state of permanent limbo, waiting hopelessly for the day you will be able to leave the camp. Many have deeply-felt needs that have never been met – learning to read and write, practising their own profession, being able to plan for tomorrow, being able to offer their children security and protection.

A journalistic presentation

The refugee camps in question – Al-Tash and Rafha – have now become household names for many municipal employees. This report is based on the reflections of these staff on the work they are doing. It is based on the insights, failures and successes that refugee case officers have been encountering in the course of their duties since 1996. All are working towards the same goal: to help the resettled refugees become self-reliant and active members of the community.

Instead of providing a statistical report listing people’s impressions and what has been learnt, we have chosen to present the refugee officers’ experiences and accounts in a series of articles. We hope this will make the subject easier to grasp and that the human aspect of refugee reception will become that much more apparent as a result. Staff in the ten local authority areas with the greatest intake of resettled refugees have willingly given of their
Introduction. Protecting the persecuted - is it enough?

Time and prepared their contributions so as to provide a clear picture of their operations. A question implicit both in their work and in this report is whether Sweden’s reception programme for resettled refugees might be organised better – and if so, how?

The refugees themselves have of course reflected on their early months and years in Sweden and on the municipal introduction programme in their area. The report includes a number of interviews with resettled refugees who have come here during this period. The interviews offer no statistical clues as to the actual state of affairs, and nor for that matter does any of the other material. They simply represent the thinking of certain individuals about the reception situation for refugees in Sweden once their everyday lives begin.

One group not affected by this report, however, is the 400-odd Bosnians who arrived in Sweden via the refugee quota during the same period. Bosnians have been arriving in the 1990s both as asylum-seekers and as resettled refugees. In their case, too, municipal refugee staff in Sweden had no choice but to adjust rapidly to a new situation – especially as the influx involved a large number of asylum-seekers requiring immediate settlement. Only two or three of the local authorities in the present study have taken in more than a couple of Bosnians as resettled refugees during the 1996-98 period. In 1998, for instance, only 33 Bosnians came to Sweden as part of the quota. Clearly, the Bosnians’ introductions to Sweden have not generated as many questions from reception offices.

**Ten local authorities taking part**

The local authorities that have contributed to this report are: Borås, Karlshamn, Karlstad, Luleå, Lycksele, Nynäshamn, Skellefteå, Umeå, Uppsala and Örebro.

Sweden is one of the 18 countries that cooperate with the UNHCR on the resettlement of resettled refugees from other parts of the world. The other recipient countries are: Argentina, Australia, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland and the US.

The material in the report is presented in the form of different themes and concludes with the National Integration Office’s own analysis and proposals for action.

**Editor’s remark:** In the report, ‘local authority’ is sometimes used as a generic term for the municipal staff who work with refugee reception, liaison and introduction programmes. We hope this will improve the flow of the report.
Are local authorities getting enough information about new refugees?

Three sources of information

Local authorities in Sweden that take in refugees are also responsible for providing them with introduction plans. These plans are supposed to be individually designed to take into account each person’s specific background and competence. The local authorities must therefore have access to a range of basic data about the refugees – both adults and children – who will be settling in their area. Certain particulars, e.g. concerning disabilities and serious health problems, are important to know prior to arrival if the reception process is to work smoothly.

One of the aims of introduction plans is to give newcomers the kind of information about Sweden and the Swedish language that is “in line with their skills, their capabilities and their situations”. Other targets include addressing any health problems that the new arrivals may have and providing an initial documented assessment of each person’s level of education and vocational skills.

Information about resettled refugees is drawn from three sources: UNHCR documentation, the Migration Board’s selection interviews and the refugees’ own accounts. Below, we review each information source and its usefulness in refugee reception programmes.

Information about resettled refugees - UNHCR dossiers

Every year, a number of Swedish local authorities declare themselves willing to take in persons in need of sanctuary as part of what is termed the refugee quota. The quotas are made up of people in various parts of the world who are judged to be in a partic-
ularly vulnerable position. Their fate has come to the attention of the UNHCR in one way or another, often as a result of them fleeing from their countries of origin together with their families.

War, purges, persecution and political upheaval are constantly forcing thousands of people to flee their homes. In crisis areas where large numbers are displaced, transit camps are set up in neighbouring countries to give the refugees a chance of survival. Food and supplies are distributed to the camps via international aid channels and with the assistance of the countries in which the camps are located.

This is how refugee life begins for most people when war breaks out in the area where they live. Their dramatic flight is followed by a monotonous wait and endless days of uncertainty in the camps. Any initial hopes they may have of being able to return home quickly gradually dissolve as the days turn to months and the months to years. Eventually, the families in the camp have no alternative but to turn their gaze to parts of the world that they have only heard about, or read about in a book or an article. Many men separated from their families and uncertain about their fate - where they are, what kind of shape they are in - are obliged to consider a life even further removed from their loved ones.

But no country in the world takes in totally anonymous refugees from transit camps. All the governments concerned have criteria for the people they are willing to grant sanctuary in their countries. The number of places is limited, as are the countries’ resources for refugee reception. Often, those persons in greatest
need of protection or who have the best chance of coping with their new environment are given precedence. Few of the people who reach transit camps manage to bring with them certificates, identity documents or other official papers documenting their backgrounds. Someone has to try to record their vocational and educational experience, their age, family relationships, state of health, etc. In addition, someone has to try to assess how vulnerable these people are - which of them faces the greatest peril if they return home. This task, providing anonymous camp inmates with a documented identity, is performed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR.

Everyone gets a dossier

Each refugee is given a dossier. The contents of the dossier are partially confidential and may only be accessed by UNHCR staff and by asylum case officers from the recipient countries. A dossier might very well contain sensitive information about a person’s political activities. Such information might harm members of the person’s family left behind in his/her native country if it leaks out. This is why UNHCR dossiers are classified as confidential. The rules governing confidential information prevent the details in the dossier from being passed on to the recipient local authority in Sweden. Dossier particulars concerning a refugee’s political background or health, for instance, may only be passed on if the person concerned gives his or her express permission.

In other words, local authorities are usually unable to gain access to this information beforehand. They have to seek such particulars from one of the other two available sources: the selection interviews or the refugees themselves.

Information about resettled refugees

- interviews during the selection process

Sweden has no standard questions put to people in refugee camps who are hoping for asylum in this country. This is because the criteria for selection vary from year to year. The rules concerning the use of the Swedish refugee quota are determined by the Government each year. The Government decides both how many people the quota should contain and the general orientation of refugee selection for that year. The budget for each year’s resettled refugee undertaking is determined by the Riksdag.

Sweden cooperates closely in this with the UNHCR. This body is well informed as to the refugee situation in various parts of the world.
world. It can advise the Government about where help is needed
most. Practical responsibility for the selection of refugees and
their resettlement in Sweden lies with the Migration Board.

Specific questions
When a Swedish selection team goes on a mission to a refugee
camp, it has a specific set of questions to put to the refugees.
When boat people from Vietnam were to be selected, for
instance, the team asked them about their
• family relationships
• ethnic affiliation
• time in the camp
• educational background.

Another year, when the task was to select Iranians for the refugee
quota, a completely different set of questions took priority:
• assessment of refugee status, need for protection
• risk assessment.

Interviews with refugee families in the camps last about an hour
and are conducted with the help of interpreters. The discussions
have to focus on the most relevant questions. Swedish officials on
such missions therefore learn completely different things about
the people involved when they are out in the field. The refugee
situation in the world alters shape from year to year, and the
Swedish selection of resettled refugees with it.

Swedish selection teams, therefore, gather different kinds of infor-
mation each year. During the 1992-1995 period, for instance, the
teams arranged for the refugees to be given medical check-ups.

One factor influencing the content of the information is that the
interpreters used in the refugee interviews also live in the camps
and have received their training there. The interpreters’ qualifi-
cations vary – some are more or less self-taught in English.

"The interpreters’ qualifications vary – some are more or less self-taught in English."

Not even basic personal particulars – such as dates of birth and the spelling of names – are sure to be correct when
the refugees are interviewed. People with little or no education cannot be
expected to supply the exact month and date, nor can they be sure how many
times the Western letter ‘s’ occurs in their surnames. The contrasts are strik-
ing. The same camp houses university-
trained refugees, some of them with international work experi-
ence. Their accounts when they are interviewed are usually more
Are local authorities getting enough information?

precise, although these people, too, may lack identity papers. But systemised information of the kind found in the Swedish civil registry – based on people’s date of birth and civic registration number – is not to be expected. This is not how administrative practices work in the refugees’ countries of origin. Nor are birthdays something that the individual is particularly interested in – birthdays are not celebrated in these cultures.

Dossiers the only source of information

People included in the Swedish refugee quota after being interviewed in the camps are referred to as mission-based refugees. In the 1990s, the annual intake of mission-based refugees varied between 535 and 1,819. The rest of the quota is made up of dossier-based refugees – vulnerable people in flight who have never reached the safety of a camp. The refugee organisation UNHCR reports on such individuals’ backgrounds, personal particulars and grounds for seeking refuge.

For the Swedish authorities, these dossiers are the only source of information available about the people in this group prior to arrival. In the 1990s, dossier-based refugees numbered between 167 and 6,500 a year.

In the case of some of the resettled refugees brought to Sweden, a further source of information is available – particulars noted down during the selection interviews in the refugee camps. A number of factors are taken into account in the information-gathering process:

- The guidelines for quota undertakings that year
- The refugee’s level of education
- The competence and experience of the interpreters.

Information gathered during the mission selection process is stored at the Migration Board in Norrköping. Only a part of it may be routinely passed on to the local authorities. Others kinds of information may only be passed on with the express permission of the refugee concerned. Normally, the amount of information supplied to the local authorities by the Migration Board takes up no more than half a page.

Information about refugees – municipal interviews in preparation for introduction plans

Each person is an individual. This is one of the basic principles underlying Sweden’s introduction programmes.”
rather than taking the form of rigid package solutions. Refugee officers, therefore, are required to draw up personalised introduction plans in consultation with the refugee concerned. The plans are to take into account each individual’s qualifications and capabilities and outline a practicable path to active community participation and a livelihood in Sweden.

The consultations that take place in preparing these introduction plans represent the local authorities’ third and most detailed source of information. The information is not elicited in an atmosphere of interrogation. During the discussions with the refugee officer, it is already clear to the person concerned that he or she is allowed to stay in Sweden, which means that much of the anxiety and caution that may have been shown earlier is no longer present. Instead, the discussions can centre on what the person concerned envisages with respect to his or her own future – apart from a life of security. Introduction plans are supposed to evolve by way of a supportive dialogue. A new, more rounded picture of the individual now emerges – of the person who has become a resettled refugee in Sweden.

The information contained in a person’s introduction plan is usually stored at the local authority’s social services office or refugee office. It can be accessed by social workers and refugee officers in their work with introduction plans. Otherwise, the material is classified as confidential. The information may not be released to, say, teachers, employers or other public bodies such as the Employment Office without the refugee’s permission.

Are local authorities getting enough information about resettled refugees prior to arrival?

Refugee reception staff in ten local authority areas have commented on the quality of the information supplied about resettled refugees since 1996. Most feel that inadequate information has been available prior to arrival. Several of the liaison officers feel they would have been able to provide a more appropriate reception programme had the information been better. To be precise, they lack detailed particulars of people’s levels of education and whether they needed care or treatment. Among the staff pressing for more information are several who would like to see a more empathetic description of the circumstances under which the refugees lived prior to being resettled in Sweden.

One of them is Stina Svensson, head of the municipal refugee reception service in Borås.

“If more information had been available, reception could have been better prepared.”
“Had we known about the conditions the refugees were living in, we would have been able to do things in other ways when they arrived,” says Stina Svensson, head of the municipal reception programme in Borås.

“Had we known about the conditions people were living in, we could have been better prepared. We didn’t know about the mental pressure and the social distress that was part of life in refugee camps like Rafha. A family that has had to put up with that kind of life for years has very deeply-felt needs. It took time for us to realise this,” she says.

“Children who grow up in a setting in which the parents don’t have the chance to provide for them are naturally affected by that. They develop different standards, different kinds of behaviour than children who grow up in more normal environments.”

The harrowing descriptions of life in Rafha in Saudi Arabia came neither from the Migration Board nor from the UNHCR. The information came via TV. An item about Rafha was broadcast by the immigrant-oriented Swedish programme Mosaik and had a powerful effect on the staff in Borås.

“When so many people come from one and the same place, better information is needed,” says Stina Svensson. “If I’d known more, I’d have been a better case officer.

“This kind of knowledge affects both the neighbourhood you
choose for the family and how you place children in a school or day nursery. For many of those who came to Sweden, the move must have been like passing through a time warp – a major cultural shock. We would have been able to soften the blow a little.”

**Information about individuals**

Details of people’s age and exact date of birth have not always been accessible in the case of those refugees who came here during the 1996-1998 period. Usually, the reason has been that the date was never registered. Where the parents were illiterate at the time of the birth, the date was probably never written down at all. On the Migration Board’s forms, the lines showing the date and month of birth are often left blank. The year is sometimes specified, but even this may be the result of guesswork.

One young man who had spent several years in the Al-Tash camp put it like this:

“I don’t know how old I am – somewhere between 25 and 30, I think. I know how old my younger brother and sisters are because I’d learnt to read and write by the time they were born. My younger brother, for instance, is 16. I wrote down his birthday – and the others’ birthdays – because I felt it was important.”

In Sweden, no-one can get by for long without a civic registration number. When the time comes to enter your name in the registry, you can’t just give an approximate date. Six figures must be specified. These determine when a person begins school, comes of age, is allowed to take a driving test and may retire. It is particularly important that children are placed in the right age group in school. Several local authorities have called in experts to help determine the age of a child with the greatest possible accuracy before placing him or her in a school class.

In the case of other refugees who are a bit older, the authorities rely on the year of birth specified on the Migration Board form. In many cases – far too many – the forms have stated that the person concerned was born either on 1 January or 1 July.

“SCB (Statistics Sweden) have asked us to choose other dates besides these. The computer system that manages civic registration in Sweden is unable to register more than a thousand people for any given date,” says Björn Fahlander of the Lycksele local authority.

Margaretha Bäckström, a refugee services officer with the local
authority in Umeå, has tried to turn this important numerical exercise into an enjoyable part of the interview.

“We usually sit down and discuss the seasons of the year, and which of them is best. Together we choose one of the months in the season that he or she is most fond of. Then we point out one of the days in the calendar. These figures are then used for the civic registration number. It works rather well.”

This procedure may seem like a simple game of numbers. But changing someone’s civic registration number after it has been entered in the registry is a difficult and time-consuming process. Many municipal officers concerned with refugee reception can testify to this. The same applies in the case of paternity and maternity details. The scope for revision once the various particulars have been logged into the registry is very limited indeed.

**Information concerning a person’s state of health**

Opinions about the availability of reliable information concerning the health of the refugees varies from place to place. Most local authorities feel they were supplied with the information they needed, while some are far from happy with the data they were given by the Migration Board and the National Integration Office. Most of the discontent relates to care-intensive medical diseases and mental illnesses that were never recorded.

One startling case occurred in Umeå. A man arrived with an acute kidney condition that required immediate treatment.

Advance information about the refugees’ health is not always adequate, say Riitta Moghad-dam, Kicki Mikaelsson, Inga-Britt Nilsson and Margaretha Bäckström in Umeå.
“Had he not been taken straight to hospital on arrival in Umeå, he wouldn’t have survived the weekend,” says IngaBritt Nilsson, a liaison officer on the municipal introduction programme. “He was fortunate enough to have starved during the days immediately prior to the journey here. If he’d consumed any food or drink, his body would have ceased to function, according to the doctors in Umeå.”

The various officers in the recipient local authorities involved in the study were agreed on one point – advance information about severely disabled persons among the refugees has been fully adequate. Staff had been able to prepare for their arrival by ensuring that both specially-adapted housing and proper care were available.

### Information and confidentiality

Personal integrity becomes an important matter of principle in cases where refugees have a serious infectious disease. The Communicable Diseases Act in Sweden requires doctors who discover that a patient has a serious infection to report this to other doctors providing medical care. This information is needed to ensure proper treatment and to prevent the spread of the disease. Government agencies like the Migration Board or the National Integration Office are not duty-bound to report such matters at all. The Secrecy Act prevents them from passing on such information. In practice, the Migration Board’s regular policy in such cases is to try and convince those involved of the necessity of making the facts known themselves, for the good of all.

Proper information is also a matter of a good working relationship and mutual trust. Trust between municipal refugee staff on the one hand and officials of the Migration Board and the National Integration Office on the other. The NIO supplies information about people awaiting municipal settlement. Formally speaking, a local authority is entitled to decline a placement if the responsible officers consider it unsuitable. Life would be easier for National Integration Office staff if they were to make a point of not providing information about things like a refugee’s health problems. But there does not appear to be any suspicion that either the Migration Board or the National Integration Office deliberately withhold certain kinds of information. None of the staff interviewed harboured such suspicions. On the contrary, many were quick to affirm the trust that exists between municipal case officers and the agency officials concerned.

“Many testify to the good relations that exist between municipal refugee officers and the government agencies involved.”
Some of the municipal staff who were interviewed questioned the work procedures adopted on selection missions in refugee camps. The teams do not take along any interpreters from Sweden, recruiting them from among the camp inmates instead. As a rule, the camp interpreters lack formal language qualifications and have no points of reference whatsoever in Sweden or in Swedish public life. Correct interpretation of the exchanges is of the utmost importance for both parties in a selection interview. Personal particulars arriving at municipal reception offices sometimes contain errors that the liaison officers believe are due to confusion having arisen at the selection interviews.

More information - time for reflection
The general view among the municipal refugee staff participating in the study is that information about the new arrivals is too skimpy. But in a subsequent discussion about this, many of those interviewed sought to modulate their opinions. One reflection that is often heard is that there are certain risks attached to providing a detailed account of each person’s background and capabilities. It can scarcely be in the interests of the resettled refugees that preconceptions about their persons, or complete misunderstandings, are recorded in their dossiers and affect all their later contact with refugee case officers.

No-one contends that refugee reception is seriously threatened by the shortcomings that exist in the information field. But access to more detailed information – both about the persons concerned and about their experiences – would enable local authorities to adapt the initial reception period more closely to the needs of the individual.

Virtually all municipal refugee staff have been both surprised and moved by the harsh, impoverished existence that the resettled refugees from Al-Tash and Rafha were forced to lead for so many years – the lack of schooling, of any hope for the future, the miserable sanitary conditions, the inedible food and the contaminated water, etc. Few municipal employees could conceive how these people had been able to spend 7-17 years of their life in such conditions. No one had anyone realised just how much suffering you carry inside yourself as a result of such deprivation when you move on. Such information is not available from any of the three sources we have described. But realisation gradually dawns – both among the refugees themselves and among those whose task it is to help integrate them into Swedish society.

“Most of the case officers interviewed felt that the information they were given was too little.”
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Have the refugees been given enough information about Sweden?

What does a resettled refugee know about Sweden when he or she steps off the plane at Arlanda Airport in Stockholm and is expected to start building a new life? Not very much, according to the local authorities that take them in. The refugees’ knowledge of Sweden is often paltry and sometimes erroneous.

It is not clear which sources of information are responsible for providing either the correct information or the incorrect information. The refugees have been exposed to plenty of informal channels of information, especially in the camps. At the same time, both Swedish officials and the UNHCR have sought to supply factual information to those awaiting resettlement in Sweden. The mission teams dispatched from Sweden present a brief programme of information in the camps in connection with the selection process.

The Sweden Programme
- better community information prior to arrival

In an attempt to improve the information supplied to those due to depart for Sweden, special Sweden Programmes have been started – presentations of life in Sweden provided on the spot. The programme varies in length from a single evening to a week or two. Such presentations were provided at the Rafha camp, among others. The information was based on the book Information About Sweden, which was published by what was then the Swedish Immigration Board in 1990-97. This type of information is now being taken over by the National Integration Office.

The aim of the Sweden Programme is to facilitate the refugees’
“Those who’ve been through the Sweden Programme are quite familiar with things when they arrive here,” says Björn Fahlander in Lycksele.

arrival and resettlement here. What they learn is supposed to make it easier for them to become integrated in Sweden in the future. In all, 1,766 persons have received information through the Sweden Programme since 1992. Of these, 616 were Vietnamese (1992-93) and 1,150 Iraqis (1995-1997). A further 64 Iraqis selected from the Rafha camp for this year’s quota will also be exposed to the Sweden Programme before coming here.

The Sweden Programme has been praised in several quarters. Örebro is particularly pleased with what it has achieved:

“We received a group of resettled refugees who had been through the programme. They knew quite a lot, even things like asking for an inspection report on the flats they were to occupy,” says Hillka Wärnbäck, who has been working with refugee settlement in Örebro.

Liaison officer Björn Fahlander from Lycksele was also favourably disposed:

“We have quite a number of refugees from the Rafha camp and those who’ve been through the Sweden Programme are quite familiar with things when they arrive.”

Detailed knowledge of that kind is not often found, however. A vague and flawed understanding of Swedish life is much more common – and nothing to be surprised about, according to many
municipal refugee staff. Indeed, is it reasonable to expect someone to be able to form a picture in advance of a life that is vastly different from the one he or she is accustomed to? People who have lived for between 5 and 20 years in a refugee camp with little educational facilities have, understandably, a pretty fragile conception of the outside world. The fact that a detailed grasp of things like social insurance, home furnishing loans, study funding and other Swedish phenomena fail to lodge in the mind of each and every individual is scarcely to be wondered at. This view is shared by the great majority of the municipal refugee staff in the study.

Refugee officers in most areas, however, have drawn attention to a misconception that tends to adversely affect the work climate. Many of the new arrivals – both resettled refugees and asylum-seekers – believe that Sweden is paid by the UN to take them in. This kind of unfortunate misinformation affects people’s attitudes and creates immoderate expectations that are sometimes difficult to correct.

Wrong information sometimes causes people to distrust the local authority: case officers are suspected of trying to deceive your family and lay their hands on the UN money that the family in reality is entitled to. This kind of misunderstanding is totally unnecessary. No-one has yet managed to discover its source.

When refugees are given information via the Sweden Programmes, the way resettlement programmes are financed is repeatedly drummed into them – the fact that the Swedish taxpayer foots the entire bill. But on this particular point the Sweden Programme has failed to make its voice heard above other sources of information that may seem more credible to the individual refugee.

The importance of family

Relatives play an important role as purveyors of information and also as welcoming parties when the refugees come to Sweden. Often, relatives accompany officials to the airport to welcome the newcomers, which has made things easier both for the refugees themselves and for the liaison officers responsible for the intake. Being met by a relative – or by any fellow-countryman, for that matter – is a great help both for language reasons and in that it reinforces the refugees’ sense of security when they arrive in their new country.

“In our town, relatives often go out to the airport together to meet the new arrivals,” says Hilkka Wänbäck, Örebro. “When
that happens, the refugees don’t have to worry about being stuck in an empty flat somewhere or in a tourist hostel - it’s party time!”

Several of the municipal staff express their appreciation of the important contribution made by relatives, not only in providing the kind of network that a newcomer needs but also in helping him or her settle in and build a life. Relatives help the refugees find their way around on the housing estate and in the town in general. They also familiarise them with hundreds of facts about housing, eating habits, daily routines, school, courtesy and consideration.

“There’s a noticeable difference between people who have contact with relatives when they come here and those who arrive completely on their own,” says Christel Norrud, head of municipal refugee reception in Karlshamn.

The local authorities have no way of checking the information supplied by relatives. In part it is clearly incorrect, however, and may give an inaccurate picture of Swedish society, according to some of the municipal staff. This kind of problem is not easy to remedy, and is something you get into the bargain, comments another officer. None of the participants in the study question the importance of friends and relatives being involved in the recep-
Have the refugees been given enough information about Sweden?

Naturally enough, resettled refugees have their own views about the information supplied by the Swedish authorities concerning life here. In an evaluation of the Sweden Programme carried out in 1997, resettled refugees expressed a need for more detailed information about the difficulty of making contact with native Swedes. Also, those responsible for the Programme should provide a clearer picture of the problems of finding a job in Sweden, they said.

Direct information from experts in Uppsala

The local authorities try in various ways to initiate newly-arrived refugees into life in Sweden. Taking them on field visits to the post office, the district medical centre, the social insurance office and other places associated with everyday life is one practicable way of providing information. This method has proved especially useful in the case of illiterate refugees.

“I spend 4-5 hours a day in the company of newly-arrived families during their first week here,” says Margaretha Bäckström, a refugee case officer in Umeå. “Many of them need help with everything from buying suitable clothing for the children to..."
learning how to change buses. For those who are unable to read, there are masses of things in everyday life that are incomprehensible. And it takes time to learn how to distinguish between a medical centre and a hospital, and to keep track of dates and times. I book a couple of afternoons now and then for travelling around with an interpreter to help families read their mail. Also, they get in touch with us when they need help. Maintaining this kind of close, regular contact is time-consuming but we find it is well worth the trouble.”

**Talks for new arrivals**

Oral information in small or larger groups is another method commonly used. The Uppsala local authority has gone one step further by developing a programme of talks specifically for new arrivals. These talks deal with a range of community issues. The refugees spend a couple of hours every Tuesday morning hearing about Swedish history, the law, the social insurance system, traffic regulations, the work of the police, the labour market, housing, the right of common access to the countryside, and so on. The talks are given by specially-invited experts. The participants are divided into language groups with an interpreter for each group. This programme began in 1995 and is kept up to date by means of fresh talks when changes occur.

“All in all, we’re very satisfied with the programme, but we alter and improve it from time to time after receiving comments from the participants or perhaps noticing ourselves what has worked well and what has not,” says refugee officer Ragnhild Smedby.
Ali, Iraqi deserter:

“It’s difficult not being able to put the past behind me”

Ali comes from southern Iraq and has been in Sweden for just over two years. Prior to that, he lived for five years in the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia. His stay there was a result of his having fled from his native country and from his service with the Iraqi army.

“I’m a peaceable person and don’t really want to be a soldier, but when I was 18 I was forced to join the army. When Kuwait was invaded, I was among those who were supposed to take part. I didn’t want to fight Kuwait. The only alternative was to escape. Now I can’t go back without getting killed.”

Ali fled one night together with three comrades. In the dark, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by armoured vehicles. It was the US Army and the four young men surrendered to them. They had to spend two months living in a small US camp in the desert before being transferred to Saudi Arabia. After a year in another small camp there, they were moved in 1992 to the giant Rafha camp.

“The people living in the camp had been forced to escape from Iraq, most of them after having taken part in a failed uprising against Saddam Hussein following the defeat in Kuwait. Everyone who had taken part in the uprising had had to flee with their families.”

When Ali arrived at the Rafha camp, some 50,000 people were living there. Ali lived in a tent. In time, the families
were given materials with which to build their own houses. Ali and others like him who had arrived on their own were not as fortunate.

“We mixed water and sand built a kind of sandwall for our house walls. We had no roof, so we used canvas as protection.” The swings in temperature were dramatic, from several degrees below freezing in the winter to as much as 55 degrees in the summer, says Ali. Some families eventually installed a simple air conditioning system in their houses. Called a ‘desert cooler’, it extracts a small amount of cool air from evaporating water.

Infiltration made things worse

When Ali had been in Rafha for a year or so, a family in the camp was found to have been placed there by Iraqi intelligence. The camp command reacted by adopting a tougher stance and making things more difficult for all the inmates. Armoured vehicles rolled into the compound and opened fire on civilians. Discontent grew among the refugees and a minor rebellion ensued. When a Saudi soldier was killed, the camp started sending people back to Iraq in revenge. A curfew was imposed and anyone who broke it was jailed and tortured, says Ali.

“They took just anyone. Our homes were searched but no weapons were found. After that, the Arabs began treating us badly.”

Financial conditions deteriorated, too – the medical centre was closed down and no new clothing was distributed. Nobody was allowed to leave their home after 10 p.m. Those who had built up small shops and stores saw them smashed and their goods confiscated.

“Life in the camp became really tough. Also, fewer delegations came on visits, and the general hopelessness led to an increase in the suicide rate,” says Ali.

Every six months, he received the equivalent of SEK 600 to live on. This was to cover everything except food. Ali sometimes sold his food in order to be able to buy other things.

Critical of the interview method

Eventually, life in the camp became more stable once again, people built up their stores and a certain sense of security returned. Still, says Ali, it is impossible for delegations going there on visits to understand how much suffering there is in the camp. Visitors are not allowed to move around on their own, and as there are soldiers everywhere, people dare not say what conditions in the camp are really like, he adds.

Ali was turned down for two selection groups, one bound for the US and one for Canada. He is very critical of the method whereby no more than half of those who are summoned for interviews are actually selected. The pressure on those who have been waiting for their chance for years is unbearable, he says. He himself had pledged ‘on his mother’s honour’ to take his own life if he was not selected third time round. But the Swedish delegation chose him, and in early 1998 he left the Rafha camp.

“I don’t know why I was chosen that time.

Ali, Iraqi deserter

“It’s difficult not being able to put the past behind me”
It's difficult not being able to put the past behind me”

- the questions were roughly the same and so were my answers. The interview itself takes between one and two hours. It almost seems as though it’s luck that decides whether you’re accepted or not.”

From hell to paradise

Two of Ali’s companions were selected for the US when he himself was turned down. The third young man with whom he fled from Iraq had been sent back there previously, and Ali has not heard from him since.

Finding one’s feet in a new country is not easy, says Ali.

“How can you describe how it feels to leave hell and enter paradise? Living in a small room and then being able to walk out into the sunshine and meet people. At the same time, though, I feel sorry for those who are still in the camp. You become friends after living together for so many years. I still keep in touch with them. That also makes it difficult to start anew – not being able to put the past behind me affects my mind. But they are my friends and they beg me all the time to help them. So I would like to send a call for help to all humanitarian organisations. I hope it won’t end as my fellow-countrymen in the camp believe it will – with them wasting away in the desert and simply disappearing unnoticed, without trace.”
Divided families
Those left behind in the camps are sorely missed

“The first thing everyone asks when they arrive is whether the rest of their family can be brought here as well,” says Björn Fahlander of the Lycksele municipal refugee programme. All the other local authorities have heard the same thing.

When a close relative has been left behind – a brother or sister, children or parents – the newly-arrived refugees devote almost all their energy to trying to get them out of the camp and preferably on to Sweden to join the rest of the family. Much time is spent on writing letters with the help of municipal staff, appealing to the Migration Board or the UNHCR, and on cultivating other channels such as doctors and lawyers in the hope of persuading them to support their cause.

Besides taking up much of their time, the refugees’ anxiety is also mentally exhausting. Family divisions, therefore, tend to be a major obstacle preventing people from getting on with their new lives. The worry and grief they cause have a paralysing effect and make it impossible for many of the refugees to absorb what their new lives are about. They lack the necessary concentration and their thoughts are elsewhere all the time, say the local authorities.

Women’s families invisible

Many have observed that the women in particular are hostages to grief and anxiety and almost obsessed with how the relatives they left behind are faring in the camps or in their native countries.

“I can’t give my children love because I’m always thinking about my brother left behind in the camp,” says Nazdar Abdullahi, who spent 17 years in the Al-Tash refugee camp before coming to Nynäshamn three years ago with her husband and children (page 57).

One reason why the women grieve and yearn more than the men may be that they are more likely to have missing relatives. The
Family members are primarily selected in accordance with the man’s lineage, so only his relatives can go along.

Criteria that determine which members of the family may leave the camp together mostly follow the man’s lineage, which means that it is his relatives who may cite family ties as grounds for coming here. In accordance with cultural tradition, the woman belongs to the man’s family once they are married. Her original family is therefore not ‘visible’ and thus has no chance of being selected under the present regulations.

**Relatives help one another**

Family relations have a much deeper social significance in the Middle East than in northern Europe. ‘Family’ is a much broader concept there, and is at the root of the culture. The move to Sweden, where the emphasis is on the individual rather than the collective, represents a major change in lifestyle for refugees from the Middle East. The basis of these families’ cultures is that relatives help one another. Brothers and sisters are jointly responsible for supporting their parents. Living close to your family and sharing their experiences and responsibilities is considered only natural. On arrival here, many refugees have described their feelings of guilt at having been ‘chosen’ and having been allowed to leave the camp while other members of the family have had to stay behind. Leaving the camp thus represents a dual conflict – you forfeit the security of your extended family and at the same time are unable to fulfill your family responsibilities as prescribed by tradition.

People usually keep in comparatively close touch with members of the family still in the refugee camp, via phone calls and letters once or twice a month. Some relatives bring pressure to bear: “you’ve done well for yourselves, now you’ve got to help us”. This makes the burden of responsibility even harder to bear. Usually,
the resettled refugees in Sweden send money as a matter of course if relatives ask for it for their upkeep.

Some refuse to leave the camp unless the whole family is allowed to travel with them. Qahraman Shateri and his sister turned down the opportunity to leave the Al-Tash camp. Eventually, the whole family was allowed to leave together. His story can be found at the end of this chapter.

The intense feelings of grief and sorrow that family break-ups engender may be due not only to culture but also to the way human relationships work in a more general sense. It is only natural for people who share difficult periods in their lives to grow close and be saddened by the thought of separation. Many of the children are particularly saddened by the prospect of leaving grandparents behind. It is common for children in the camps to develop close ties to the older generation, who are often chiefly responsible for their upbringing.

**Family reunion a natural course**

Making sure that the selected families are as complete as possible should be a matter of course, says Björn Fahlander, Lycksele.

“The presence of husband, wife, siblings and parents is usually enough to ensure the family’s well-being. Think how much easier it would have been if whole families had been selected for the quota from Rafha in 1995 – all the suffering we could have prevented and the money we could have saved.”

Kenneth Fluor of the Migration Board’s permits department says mission teams try to select refugees in such a way that no supplementary immigration is necessary.

“But,” he adds, “we also comply with UNHCR practice in this area, whereby a family is defined as the nuclear family, in other words parents and children, or a household unit. These are the people who make up the selected group and no-one else, really. Exceptions can however be made in the case of someone like an elderly mother.”

Sweden and the UNHCR are in agreement on this point. Other countries, the US among them, apply a considerably narrower definition, and select their refugees without the same regard to family relationships.

Officials at the Migration Board’s visa department can sympathise with the view that the whole family should be kept together. But they also see another side of the matter.

**“Ensuring that the selected families are as complete as possible should be a matter of course.”**
On one of our missions in the Rafha camp, the team was assigned to try and select a ‘whole’ family, in other words a married couple with married children who in turn had children of their own. When we had gone through the whole group, we found ourselves with a family numbering 70 people. What local authority would be able to take in a group of that size? We decided not to take the entire family, and instead selected none of them at all, despite the fact that a couple of those who had married into the family had close relatives in Sweden. Any other course would probably have caused even greater anguish,” says Ruben Ahlvin, the chief liaison officer for the Swedish refugee quota.

Another reason why it is difficult to choose so many from the same family is that the quota is limited. Each selection team can only choose a specific number of people for resettlement in Sweden. If the definition of family were to be extended, all the places might be filled by just one or two families.

“I fully appreciate the problems faced by the municipal refugee officers in this respect,” says Ruben Ahlvin, “but we have chosen to adopt the same position as the UNHCR on this.”

In the UNHCR’s interpretation, it is usually the man who is the head of the family, which is why family ties are based on him.

“This is an old-fashioned way of looking at things,” says Ruben Ahlvin. “When we’ve asked the UNHCR to submit families with close relatives in Sweden, we’ve only been given the names on the man’s side. The women’s families are not in the dossier. We’ve drawn attention to this and a certain awareness of the problem is now beginning to emerge.”

In a few odd cases, the woman is counted as the head of the family, where it is she who needs sanctuary most. In such cases, which often involve a widow or a politically active person, it is her family structure that takes precedence.
Qahraman Shateri, Skellefteå

“We’re like natives, Skellefteå is our new birthplace!”

Qahraman came to Sweden in April 1998. The family are Kurds from Iran. The father grew wheat and rye and had cows and sheep. He was politically active and the family were forced to flee to Iraq in 1979. They lived in a succession of places and in 1982 arrived at the Al-Tash refugee camp.

You have nothing at all in the camp, says Qahraman. People had to go and fetch water themselves and carry it home on their heads. Not that you could drink it, he says, but you needed it all the same, for washing and cooking. The men left home at 7 a.m. and returned at 6 p.m. Most of them sold clothing and
repaired shoes, Qahraman’s father among them. The inmates of Al-Tash are often ill, says Qahraman. And they are constantly thinking about going back to Iran, and how the children are getting on.

Qahraman attended the camp’s local Kurdish school instead of the government school. He had to learn English outside school from others in the camp. “My parents wanted me to learn English. They’re illiterate and it’s important for them to see their children studying and writing and also speaking English. We had no work materials at school, we had to buy our own pen and paper.

*Declined to go*

“On 25 December 1991 I became the English teacher in the local school. From 1994 to 1997 I was the headmaster and from 1997 to 1998 the director of the school. I interpreted for the UN and also
for those who only knew Persian, helping them to write letters to the UN.

The UN offered Qahraman the chance to leave the camp but as the offer only applied to him and his sister, he turned it down. He wanted the whole family to go.

In 1997, there were further interviews and all ten were allowed to come to Sweden the following year.

"That's my mother, father and all eight of us children. Just as long as we're free, that's the important thing."

Like natives of Skellefteå

The family came directly to Skellefteå.

"At first we were really angry. It was cold here with lots of snow, and we had no relatives we could visit in Skellefteå. We felt abandoned. Our relatives are in Nora, Karlstad, Eskilstuna and Kil. We would have preferred to live in one of those places. I was very angry at Kjell Jansson, the refugee officer. But he's a good man, we're friends now. And things got better after six or seven months. We're happy to be here nowadays, we have two adjoining flats. Two of my former students also live in Skellefteå, and there are others in southern Sweden. I don't think we'll ever move away from here. We're like natives, Skellefteå is our new birthplace. We're also picking up the local dialect."

School and the over 45s

Qahraman suspects his parents will never learn Swedish. People who are over 45, he says, should not be obliged to. Trying time and again and getting nowhere only depresses them.

He does not know exactly how old he is.

"As my parents are illiterate, I don't know when I was born. I think my father is 53. I myself am 'almost 30', they keep telling me. One thing I know is that I hadn't started school when we fled in 1979. My 15-year-old brother is a proper Swede. He speaks five languages and he knows when he was born. I wrote down the date. Four of my brothers and sisters are under 16. They all know when they were born."

The young think differently

Qahraman would like to work for the UN or the Red Cross and help other refugees. The older generation, he says, think a lot about relatives who are still in the camp. The young ones are not concerned in the same way, he believes.

"But we have relatives in Iraq who need to come to Sweden. The Migration Board is against bringing them here - they say it's up to the UN to arrange it in that case. Things are getting harder and harder for those who are still in the camps. They're being forgotten."
The importance of camp life
How it affects the refugees’ lives in Sweden

People who have lived in refugee camps nurse experiences that differ from those of other refugees. Life in the camp, with its lack of freedom and uncertainty about the future, its passivity, the pinning for close friends and relatives and people’s exclusion from normal activities, has an impact on their later lives outside the camp.

“They need a longer introduction period than others when they come here, there’s no question about that,” says IngaBritt Nilsson, a liaison officer on the municipal refugee introduction programme in Umeå.

All the local authorities agree on this point: introduction periods for resettled refugees who have spent a long time in camps must be increased substantially. None of them, they say, are able to provide proper introductions within the two-year period for which government funding is available. The cultural differences are too great and the refugees are under too much strain both physically and mentally for this to be a feasible goal.

Many of the refugees who came here in 1996-1998 are in worse shape than those who came from the same camp in 1995 – more passive and more exhausted mentally.

“The refugees who came to us from the Rafha camp in 1997 and 1998 are considerably more passive than those who arrived earlier,” says refugee officer Christel Norrud, Karlshamn. “All those years of camp life have marked them deeply.”

Björn Fahlander, Lycksele: “The fact that they were originally ‘left out’ of the quota while others were allowed to depart may have contributed to these people’s passivity. The feeling that there’s no point any more, coupled with the fact that they had to spend additional years in the camp, has left them in worse shape than those who arrived earlier.”
But the amount of time spent in the camp is not the only determining factor, say the municipal refugee staff in Luleå. The way the refugees feel has to do with a whole range of factors, not just the arrival date in Sweden. It is closely related to their origins, their educational background and how long they have been refugees. Those who had been politically active and who felt they had been fighting for a just cause often coped with camp life better than those who felt they had simply been victims, pawns in a game they did not understand.

Those who have to wait in a camp for many years have little or no experience of ordinary life with all it entails.

Unfamiliar with ‘normal’ life

“The younger refugees know only of camp life. The women have spent all their time cooking, lighting fires and looking after the children. They know nothing about the outside world and have no experience of ‘ordinary’ life at home in the village or town. This means that the switch to a life in Sweden represents a giant leap,” says Kjell Jansson, a liaison officer in Skellefteå.

He visited the Rafha camp himself to present a Sweden Programme and does not feel the tough criticism of the camp is wholly justified.

“Even if life there was of course traumatic and difficult, people
showed consideration for one another and you saw a kind of practical creativity that helped many of the inmates to cope better,” he says.

Many of those who work with resettled refugees are unhappy about not having access to general information about the camps themselves – about the way they are organised, culture, religion and the values people hold there. This kind of background data, they say, would contribute greatly to staff’s understanding and processing of the refugees when they arrive.

Camp descriptions

Ownership of the camps themselves varies from country to country. The UNHCR, however, always has the approval of the host country – in the form of a lease, rent or some other kind of contract or tacit agreement – for the camp’s location. The UNHCR usually funds the operation of the camp, otherwise the host country pays. In the case of the Rafha camp, the Saudis in principle pay all the costs except for the UNHCR staff.

The Al-Tash camp in Iraq houses Iranian Kurds forced to leave their homes when war broke out between Iran and Iraq in 1980. Some of the men arrived at the camp later, as they had originally belonged to the Kurdish guerrilla forces (peshmerga) and had lived and fought with them in northern Iraq for a number of years.

The Al-Tash camp in Iraq houses Iranian Kurds forced to leave their homes when war broke out between Iran and Iraq in 1980. Some of the men arrived at the camp later, as they had originally belonged to the Kurdish guerrilla forces (peshmerga) and had lived and fought with them in northern Iraq for a number of years.

At first, all were housed in tents, but people then built their own places out of dried mud. Summers are very hot in this region, up to 50 degrees. The men were allowed to go out of the camp to seek work so that they could buy food for their families, as the funds provided by Iraq were too little to cover the inmates’ upkeep. The UN’s economic sanctions against Iraq have also resulted in growing inflation, which made it even harder for the families to get by. Before the men were allowed to leave the premises in the mornings, they had to register with the camp guards. Leaving the camp was not without its risks – several men had disappeared after going out to find work.
The women’s tasks included fetching and carrying water, which is hot and heavy work. (Nor was the water clean – it could not be used for drinking purposes, only for washing.)

There were two schools in the camp: one open to all up to the fifth grade, providing tuition in Arabic, and a fee-paying private school for those families who could afford it, where the children were able to speak their own language. The latter was considered better but not everyone had the money to send their children there. By Swedish standards, all the children who have come here from Al-Tash have considerable gaps in their education.

Malnutrition and deficiency diseases were also commonplace among the children in the camp.

The Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia houses Arabic-speaking Iraqis originating from southern Iraq. Many had been well off previously, with big farms and fruit and vegetable plantations. Their financial status had been sound and both boys and girls had attended school before the families were forced to flee. As most of the men had been politically active, they had suffered many years of persecution in Iraq, and many of them had been imprisoned, abused and tortured.

Thus these refugees have had grim experience both of persecution in their native countries and of life in the Rafha camp, and have been exposed to more violence than the Kurdish refugees from the Al-Tash camp.

Out in the Saudi desert

The Rafha camp is situated in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert and is completely cut off from the outside world. Saudi soldiers guard and control the camp and no-one may go beyond the fence without a permit.

During the camp’s early years, there were disturbances there. These principally involved young men protesting at not being allowed to live with their families. The Saudis quelled the uprising by force and things gradually calmed down in the camp. Some improvements were made in the refugees’ situation as well.

Food and water were never a problem in the Rafha camp as the Saudi government saw to it that supplies were sent in regularly.

The women were obliged to comply with Saudi laws regarding clothing, and were not allowed to move around outdoors without being covered from head to toe. The children, too, had to be kept in. Homes consisted of simple shacks or tents. Members of the

“Many had been imprisoned, abused and tortured.”
same family placed their tents close enough to one another so that they could pass back and forth without having to go out.

Today, housing in the camp comprises concrete homes with air conditioning.

(Sources: the refugees' own accounts and 'Extended psychosocial post-arrival interviews to facilitate the early introduction of supportive measures in resettled refugee families'/Kjerstin Almqvist)

Rafha inmates tell their stories

Manda Björling, a teacher at a school in Uppsala, has spent a couple of years compiling a study of five men of different ages who have spent seven years in the Rafha camp. All five are severely traumatised and have considerable difficulty in functioning properly in society. With the help of an interpreter, Manda Björling has recorded their accounts, which they themselves have illustrated with drawings.

“In 1991 we walked from Iraq to Saudi Arabia. We fled from the war. We were put in a camp close to the border with Iraq, in the middle of the desert near the town of Rafha. In fact it was called the Rafha Camp. We lived there in tents for seven years together with 35,000 other refugees. Five people lived in each tent. The tents were packed close together with no room in between.

The winters were very cold. Sometimes there was ice in the water bucket in the mornings. The summers were terribly hot, up to 50 degrees in the shade. There were also sandstorms when it was hot and the sand got into everything: your tent, your clothes, your food.
Every four days, a water lorry arrived. It filled up a cistern and we were allowed to fill our cans from it. We were allowed 20 litres of water, which was supposed to last two people four days. That's two and a half litres of water a day per person. This was supposed to be enough to drink and cook with. To wash our clothes and ourselves we had to use water from the well, but it was saline. So all our clothes were stiff from the salt and our skin always tasted salty.

There was high fencing around the camp with watchtowers where soldiers stood guarding us with their rifles. Sometimes when there were disturbances in the camp they would turn high-pressure hot-water hoses on those involved. There was some kind of chemical in the water, too, so if you got it on your skin it left sores. They also punished troublemakers by burying them up to their heads in the hot desert sand. They were left there in the burning sun all day. By the end of the day, they were dead. During one uprising in the camp, in 1993, some 500 or 600 people were killed by the soldiers, but the Saudis kept the true number secret and said only a few people had been wounded.

There was a curfew from 11 in the evening to 6 in the morning. During that time you were not even allowed to go to the toilet. The toilets were situated outside the camp living area. There was also a proper stone building there, the camp prison.

The children were allowed to go to school, but people often didn’t dare send their children as they could be raped by the soldiers. Abuse of both boys and girls was a fact of everyday life.

The women sat in their tents all the time and hardly ever went out. There was nothing for them to do out there, and also it was

“We were never really short of food, but there was never enough water.”
(Men’s own illustration)
dangerous to go out as this was a man’s world and it was a dangerous one. When they washed, a tent was set up within the tent using pieces of cloth. When they had to go out, they were covered from head to toe so as not to show any part of their body.

There were carrier bicycles in the camp that we could use to transport food and water. At first we were given ready-cooked food but then we were given the basic ingredients so that we could cook for ourselves. We had gas ovens that we cooked the food on. We were given lamb, chicken and fish. We cooked our meals in the tents but baked the bread outside.

Animals were allowed in the camp. We had 50 hens and 8 cockerels in our family. Others kept a cat or a rabbit, perhaps, but not to eat. There were millions of flies, and as many mosquitoes. Rats and mice thrived in the camp, and at night owls came to hunt them. Outside the camp, on the other side of the wire, you could see the army tanks and we also saw camels, the ships of the desert. But we were never allowed out of the camp. There were plenty of snakes. Some of them were 2-3 metres long and as thick as your leg. Poisonous snakes were common, too. If someone was bitten we immediately took a knife and cut the place open so that we could suck out the poison. Then you were given an injection containing an antidote.

We were never really short of food, but there was never enough water. Heat and sand, cold and thirst, being under guard and being abused – we experienced quite a lot during our seven years in the camp.

“Outside the camp, on the other side of the wire, you could see the army tanks.”
(Men’s own illustration)

“The women sat in their tents all the time and hardly ever went out.”
When we were finally selected for departure to our new country, Sweden, we were carefully searched along with our baggage to make sure we weren’t taking out any evidence (like photographs) of the situation in the camp. We left El Rafha with mixed feelings. We had to leave many of our friends behind and we don’t know what has happened to them.”

Refugees work through their experiences of war, torture and camp life in the Neptune Group in Luleå

In the sauna, everyone meets on the same terms. And many refugees come from countries with famous old bathhouse cultures. This thought struck staff working with refugee reception in Luleå when they were considering starting a men’s group there. The Immigrant Care Service and the Adult Psychiatry Clinic in Luleå collaborated in forming the Neptune Group. A group of men gather at the public baths every second Thursday together with two senior social workers, Håkan Auland and Göran Wennström, to swim and take saunas. Afterwards, the men move upstairs for coffee and to talk for an hour and a half. Not all join in the swimming or the sauna but no-one misses the discussions afterwards.

Special experiences

The men’s experience of war and torture is one common denominator in the group, another is the fact that all the members are over 25 and most of them are resettled refugees.

“If further groups of this kind were to evolve, it would be a good idea to let the men who have spent time in camps set up a group of their own as they share experiences that may be difficult for others to understand,” says Göran Wennström.

The men make up a ‘group within the group’, he notes, as they have been largely subjected to mental torture. This is not visible on the outside but causes the same kind of deep-lying damage. It “lodges in your brain”, as one of the men put it.

Helping refugees to enter society

The group participants are hand-picked. Their number has remained constant, even if some members have been replaced by
The importance of camp life

All them have been or are in close touch with the Immigrant Care Service and a number of them have previously been in contact with Göran Wennström via the Adult Psychiatry Clinic.

The fact that they share same kind of experience is important for the participants. Most of them are used to feeling they are alone with their problems and it has taken time for the men to pluck up the courage to talk about what they have been through. Eventually, though, they were able to discuss things like forgetfulness and loss of concentration – which often follows from torture – as the others recognise these symptoms and understand them.

The purpose of the group has been to help the male refugees enter Swedish society. At the same time they have got to know one another and become supportive of one another. A very important factor has been the ability of all the members of the group to understand and speak Swedish, so that they are able to communicate properly.

The sessions focus on different subjects and specialists are often invited in to give talks. In many cases, Göran Wennström and Håkan Auland are the only Swedes that the men have any contact with, and they are very appreciative when other people come and talk about Swedish matters. Sometimes, too, these visits awaken painful memories, which occurred for instance when medical centre staff described how the Swedish health care service worked and how it treated refugees exposed to torture. This led to lively discussions about doctors and credibility, and one of the refugees recalled how doctors had been involved in the torture sessions in his native country.

“**The male role in Sweden is very different from what these men are used to.**”

For men only

The Thursday group fulfils an important function as a forum where men can get together to compare experiences and exchange thoughts with one another, say Wennström and Auland. There are certain topics that are important for male immigrants to discuss on their own – the man’s role in Sweden is very different from what they are used to. It is hard for them to find work and keep their families, which traditionally has been the male’s most important function in many societies. Those who are further marked by war and traumatic experiences may also have difficulty finding their way in their new country and being supportive towards the members of their family. In such a situation, it is good to have someone to put all those questions to.
Bounds of Security: The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden
Housing for resettled refugees
Ready and waiting on arrival

Resettled refugees are given a different kind of reception in Sweden than others granted asylum here, in a variety of ways. The differences are particularly evident during the early part of their stay here. People arriving via the refugee quota begin their introduction programmes on their first day in their new country. They don’t have to wait for the authorities to consider their grounds for asylum. Their cases have already been approved and their permits are ready. Consequently, resettled refugees can travel straight to the area chosen for them and move into a vacant flat awaiting their arrival.

Well-prepared ground
This contrasts sharply with the procedure for asylum-seekers. They are required either to live at a reception centre while waiting for their cases to be dealt with or to arrange their own accommodation during the wait. ‘Own accommodation’ usually means moving in with friends or relatives. The only income these families receive is a state housing allowance of SEK 1,000 a month and daily benefit of approx. SEK 70 per head for single adults and approx. SEK 60 per head for couples living together. In addition, different sums are paid for children of different ages. Internally, the authorities refer to such families as ‘e-bos’ (eget boende = own accommodation). Asylum-seekers who arrange their own accommodation do not have access to the introduction programmes organised by local authorities, nor may they apply for work training or a job until their permits come through. Permits may take time to arrive, sometimes months – or occasionally years.

Resettled refugees are installed much more quickly. The ground is well prepared when they arrive. The National Integration Office’s case officers have selected a suitable local authority area
in which the family can settle. Here, an administrative officer has arranged for the provision of a flat large enough to accommodate them. In some areas, resettled refugees are studying and working within a week of their arrival.

**Swedish officials decide their lives**

This kind of rapid installation is supposed to facilitate the integration of the families into the community. But the well-intentioned haste that such a procedure involves has another side to it - most of the preparations are carried out completely over the heads of the families concerned. Families selected for the refugee quota are simply allocated an area to live in (unless they have relations in a specific local authority area elsewhere). It may be Karlshamn in the south – or Skellefteå in the north. The local authority area must be identified before the family is allowed to travel to Sweden. No-one asks the refugee families how they feel about the area chosen for them. That is the place where the families’ introduction programmes will be arranged. And that is where the local authority is to ensure that the families are given a proper introduction to the language, the community and the labour market. For this purpose, it receives a government grant. Families that insist on moving elsewhere have to arrange tenancy agreements of their own. Also, in metropolitan areas you usually have to wait to get Swedish tuition and job training.

Thus resettled refugees are often placed in areas that asylum-seekers tend to ignore. Asylum-seekers usually prefer large towns or cities - a pattern that is a source of concern to decision-makers in places with chronic housing shortages. Placing resettled refugees in areas where the authorities can offer both housing and the requisite preparedness is wise from a community planning viewpoint - good resources should be made use of. But official choices are also life-choices for the quota families. It is here they are to be given their start and put down their first roots in Sweden. Many, too, will spend their lives here - thanks to decisions taken by someone else in the office of a Swedish public authority.

**Few seek help from private landlords**

Without municipal housing, Sweden would probably not be able to take in resettled refugees in an organised manner. In almost all local authority areas, it is the municipal housing companies that provide flats for families in need of sanctuary. Private landlords do not usually cooperate to the same extent. In most local authority
areas, refugee officers have stopped asking private landlords. They find it more worthwhile to concentrate on areas where refugees stand a chance of obtaining a contract. It is better, they feel, to concentrate on housing areas where the refugees have a chance of a flat.

Some local authority areas – among them Uppsala and Örebro – have budgeted for the purchase of tenant-owned flats or houses which they then rent out to refugee families. But the great majority of families are provided with municipal flats.

As we have noted, housing is selected prior to the arrival of the families in Sweden. The choices are made by a single municipal officer – usually a refugee officer. This officer thereby exercises an exceptional degree of influence on housing policy in the area. In most areas, the general aim among political representatives is to avoid housing segregation – the confinement of people with non-Swedish mother tongues and cultural backgrounds to a few specific areas. But few local authorities have formulated clear political guidelines as to how segregation is to be prevented.

When choosing housing for resettled refugees, the officers concerned often have to shoulder the kind of responsibility that political representatives shy away from – selecting suitable housing areas for people from a different ethnic background. Is letting people from other countries live near those who speak the same language an important principle? Or is it better to house newcomers among those who speak the language of the natives? Should socio-economic housing patterns be accepted or counteracted? All refugee officers whose task is to find housing for others have to confront these questions.

\[\text{In most areas, the general aim among local politicians is to avoid housing segregation.}\]

Karlshamn - interpreting the political will

In Karlshamn, choosing a suitable housing area is no great problem. Refugee officers there try to find flats in different parts of the municipality precisely with the aim of preventing housing segregation. The local authority has no explicit policy in this respect, but the officials concerned feel that their approach is well in line with the intentions of the municipal leaders.

“We don’t actually have any housing segregation here worth talking about,” says Christel Norrud, head of the refugee coordinating office.

“The only exception is the centre of town, where flats are much in demand – everyone wants to live as near the centre as possible..."
if they get the chance. But everyone has the same problem on the same terms – finding a flat in the town centre is difficult.”

Örebro - how is segregation to be curbed?

The picture is different in Örebro. There, the question of how segregation is to be avoided has long been debated. Previously, a governing principle was that private landlords were to make flats available to 30 per cent of those new arrivals in need of housing – as about 30 per cent of all rented flats in the area are privately owned.

“The private landlords are no longer prepared to apply that principle,” says Hilkka Wärnbäck, who has worked with the procurement of refugee housing for the past eight years.

“If I ask the two largest companies for two flats a year, the landlords feel nowadays that they’ve filled their quota. We’ve had meetings with the property owners’ representatives about this and we’ve seemed to reach a consensus. At these meetings, we keep hearing that our proposals are ‘great’. But when we actually need the flats, the landlords present all kinds of excuses as to why they have nothing available.”

Political action needed

Some examples of what one housing officer in Örebro was told:

“Unfortunately, no-one’s vacated any of our flats – not for years.”

“We have our own queue.”

“Our Swedish tenants don’t want any more immigrant names on the doors in their staircase.”

“Don’t kid yourself that a private landlord wants to let a flat to a foreigner.”
The Abdullahis, Nynäshamn
“**All we want is for our brothers to be brought over here as well!**”

The Abdullahis came to Sweden in October 1997. Hussein, the father, and Nazdar, the mother, are both illiterate, as is Nazdar’s mother, Khorshid. The couple’s eldest daughter, Parwana, 10, attends school as does their son, Mehdi, 8, who has just started. The youngest, Garmyan, attends a day nursery. The adults have not learnt much Swedish and we converse through an interpreter.

“When we gained our freedom we had been in the Al-Tash camp for 16 or 17 years,” says Hussein. “We earned our living by buying, exchanging and selling goods on a small scale.

“Many people were executed because they were Kurds. I myself saw a 15-year-old boy being killed. We usually said we were Iranian Kurds, not Iraqi. But then they told us, ‘A Kurd is a Kurd, whether he’s black or white’.

There was nothing at the camp, not even water, says Hussein. The heat was intol-
erable, around 50 degrees. The refugees sometimes received help from the UN, such as a sack of flour once every six months.

“We still have brothers and sisters and other relations in the camp,” says Nazdar. “We can never go back to Iran and we’re very grateful that we’re allowed to stay in Sweden.

“All we want is for the Immigration Board to help us bring our brothers here. I’ve given up trying to do anything, I’ve lost my concentration. I can’t give my children love because I’m always thinking about my brother stuck in the camp. Our relatives send us letters and ask us to help get them out of there. They’re prepared to go to any country at all.”

Hussein describes how he presented his case to the UN while in the camp. He then had to wait three years before being told Sweden was prepared to take him in along with his wife Nazdar and their children, his brother and his brother’s family, and grandmother Khorshid. He now wants Nazdar’s brother and his family to be allowed to come here.

“Nazdar and my mother-in-law are very upset over the brother being left behind. It is especially important for us Kurds to be able to bring over our relatives, as we don’t have a native country of our own. When I went to school I wasn’t allowed to speak Kurdish. Some of our political organisations are banned, too.”
Hilkka Wärnbäck has often found it difficult to accept that through her efforts she is in practice reinforcing housing segregation—placing new arrivals in a few confined areas—while the local authority in principle advocates a completely different policy. Refugees are being housed in council flats. If political support for a different approach to this issue were more evident, says Hilkka Wärnbäck, she would strive instead for integrated housing areas.

“A property owner is not interested in listening to a lone refugee officer going about her duties,” she says. “To change his attitude you need someone with political standing, authority and powers of persuasion. We used to have a law regulating the allocation of housing. Today, fresh political initiatives are needed to open up the private housing market for newly-arrived refugees. Otherwise we’ll just have to sit back and watch while segregation grows.”

A better housing area – choosing and refusing

The term housing segregation in fact applies to two different mechanisms in society:

It describes discrimination currently in progress—people in a weak socio-economic position having to live in a few confined areas with high-rise flats. Refugees and first-generation immigrants are often in such a position. Segregation may also be due to the property owner having refused to house people from foreign backgrounds in attractive areas.

Housing segregation may also come about as the result of choices by individual families. People who arrive in Sweden as adults may feel more at home among other families who speak their mother tongue fluently and who enjoy the same traditions, etc.

The same housing patterns develop in both cases—people of non-Swedish origin living apart from those with Swedish roots.

A study entitled ‘Parent-child interaction and coping strategies in refugee children’ focused on refugee resettlement in the Karlstad region in the latter part of the 1990s. Two main groups were studied—Iranian and Kurdish immigrants. The study showed that the two sets of immigrants took very different views of their housing situation. Among the Iranians, many longed for better housing in a part of town with a higher socio-economic standing. Among the Kurds, this was unusual. The most important thing for them was to live near friends and relations from their own home region. They were less interested in things like housing standards and social status.
A few years after the initial interviews, 81 per cent of the Iranians had managed to find a flat in another part of town. The fact that the Kurdish families were still living in the same parts of town is fully in line with the desire they expressed to retain their proximity to relatives and childhood friends.

When the Karlstad researchers interviewed the children, another social aspect of the refugees’ housing choices emerged. The children in the Iranian families often felt lonely – 54 per cent said they did not have any close friends, while 41 per cent said they had been bullied at school.

With a view to integration

The Kurdish children seldom felt lonely. The great majority of them said they had at least one close friend – often a cousin or a friend from the camp. And none of them had experienced bullying.

Families in both these groups may be integration-minded. Those who chose to move may be interested in absorbing the Swedish language as soon as possible and developing good social contacts.

Those who stay put may feel that integration for the children means assuring them of a basic sense of security during their formative years, so these families give priority to maintaining relationships in close proximity to friends and relatives. People’s choices of where to live are based on highly personal preferences. The various alternative all involve advantages and sacrifices that must be weighed and measured within each family’s own very private sphere.

The usual values concerning which housing areas are more attractive than others are doubtless held by newly-arrived refugees as well. In a number of local authority areas, the efforts of coordinating officers to help families settle in ‘quality’ neighbourhoods or residential areas have sometimes run into strong opposition from those who have been ‘helped’ in this way. They have quite simply detested their surroundings and longed to live in other, ‘less attractive’ parts of town. This pattern is not the rule, but it does occur.

Large families – how to avoid crowding

Most of the local authorities in our survey have taken in several families with 5-10 children. Families of this size have seldom been found in Sweden in recent decades. The trend towards smaller
families with 1-3 children is reflected in the current range of flats. When municipal representatives talk about large flats today, they usually mean four-room flats. As a rule, a limited number of five-room flats are also included in the range. Larger flats than this are few and far between. Blocks of flats in Sweden nowadays are not designed to accommodate families with many children.

In order to house refugee families with more than four children, landlords have sometimes offered two adjoining flats. This type of arrangement is viewed with mixed feelings. One local authority noted that the neighbours had been upset by the constant running of children to and fro between the different parts of the home. In another municipal area, the refugee officer had only favourable comments to make about the use of ‘twin flats’.

**How do you pass on tacit rules of behaviour?**

People’s differing reactions serve as a reminder of the many unwritten rules that govern neighbour interaction in a housing area. The rules vary from place to place, and from building to building. Are you allowed to beat carpets on Sundays? Do the washing after 8 p.m? Whistle on the stairs? Play tag on the stairs or in front of the neighbour’s terrace? Play the piano on Saturday mornings? Borrow a toy lying in the sandpit in the yard? Let your brother’s family move in with you for a lengthy period? Eat strong-smelling food on the balcony?

Newcomers often find it difficult to sort out all these unwritten rules. Not even the refugee officer assigned to help them through the initial period can keep track of all the tacit rules of behaviour. In Karlstad, the municipal housing company recruits ‘area hosts’ whose job includes helping new arrivals to settle in and furthering neighbourly relations – sometimes just through providing some simple information.
Bounds of Security: The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden

PHOTO: MARK OLSON
Children in a new society
Meeting young people on their own terms

Many of the children who have come to Sweden from lives as camp refugees know of no other kind of existence. They were born in the camp, played with their friends there and perhaps attended school there as well.

Others among the children came to the camps after fleeing from their homes together with their parents. Often, these children nurse traumatic memories as a result.

Local authorities have different ways of dealing with refugee children who come to Sweden. All however supply them with personalised introduction plans, just as they do with the adults. These plans are intended to help the children find their own individual paths in life in their new country.

Introduction plans for children

One of the aims of the plan is often to find clubs or associations that match the child’s leisure-time interests. Also of importance are the exchanges that take place when the plans are drawn up and the children have the opportunity to give their own versions of events. The children’s accounts are taken seriously, and as a result of this contact they establish a relationship of their own with one or more members of the refugee office staff.

In Karlshamn, Lena Blomdahl and Katharina Olsson, both senior social services officers, have drawn up a questionnaire. Its purpose is to help establish things like what the children have been through, how long they have been refugees and what or whom they have had to leave behind. Most of the discussions take place in the home, often on the floor in the child’s room. Three visits per child is the norm. The parents are informed in advance and accept what is to happen. Some show consternation and have to be placated, having heard that children can be taken into care.

The refugee reception service collaborates with those youth re-
creation leaders who specialise in helping children with special needs.

“Our ambition is to get the children into ordinary recreational activities organised by the local community instead of programmes intended specifically for refugees, as this will give them a way through to the Swedish children,” say Blomdahl and Olsson.

In Lycksele, staff usually go through the children’s introduction plans together with the parents. The plans focus to a considerable extent on the situation in school and on the children’s need of support, etc. Often, the discussions concern the family situation as a whole. Many families require a lot of help and support if the children are to get what they need. The mothers in particular need more support than others, says liaison officer Björn Fahlander, with things like suitable diets for the children and how you choose clothing, etc.

“The amount of support required depends on the parents’ background and their own level of education. In our experience, parents whose own schooling was inadequate tend to look mostly after themselves.”

In Umeå, all families with children/young people up to the age of 20 are registered with the Refugee Children’s Service. Individual discussions are held with each child over seven. They get to talk to child psychologist Lilian Levin within three months of their arrival.

“We find that many parents don’t believe the children remember
what happened to them as they were so young at the time. They’re surprised to learn what the children tell us,” says liaison officer Inga-Britt Nilsson.

The child psychologist interviews the child alone, usually in the home, while the parents wait in an adjoining room. Then, in the presence of the child, the psychologist tells the parents what has been discussed. Naturally it is important to describe what has been said in such a way that the child does not feel betrayed.

The conversations with the children are not compulsory, but so far no-one has opposed such a course.

“The whole family gets to know us well as we work with them so closely during the initial period,” says case officer Margaretha Bäckström. “So they trust the suggestions we make.”

At the Immigrant Service Office in Luleå, the children of new resettled refugees are interviewed to ensure that their situations are clarified. First, the parents talk about their children. Then the children tell their own stories, either alone or with their brothers and sisters.

“Quite often, the children have experienced things that their parents knew nothing about, perhaps because they lived separately,” says refugee officer Eva Uusitalo. “It’s always a delicate matter when you’re told things and have to decide how much you pass on to the parents. But if the children are under eighteen, we have to encourage them to talk with their parents about such things. And...
it’s important to make clear to the children how much is going to remain between the two of us.”

Before the practice of interviewing the children was introduced at the Immigrant Service Office a few years ago, staff had spent a year planning how the interviews were to be approached.

“It’s important to stress that it’s not a question of interrogating anyone,” says Håkan Anland, another refugee officer in Luleå. “We always ensure that the children are clear about this in their minds.”

**Together with their mothers**

In the case of the youngest children, several of the local authorities arrange activities that mother and child can attend together. In the Delta Project in Borås, now discontinued, mothers took part with their preschool children. The programme comprised a blend of theoretical instruction and hands-on practical training (read more in the chapter on language training).

In Lycksele, a mother-and-child project is planned for women looking after their children at home. Most of the women are illiterate Shia Muslims.

“We’ve observed that both mother and child become isolated, with the result that the mothers are in poor mental condition. This in turn affects the children,” say preschool teachers Carola Fjällström, Camilla Marklund and Britt-Maria Fjällström.

Previously, the local authority had regular daycare activities for refugee children. But in recent years, the refugees have fallen
away and the children’s groups have become too small. As the mothers clearly enjoyed these activities and were happy to attend, the idea developed to launch the project currently in the pipeline. The mothers need to get out to a secure environment adapted to the needs of small children. The setting appeals to them, say the three preschool teachers. They like being there and can progress at their own speed. Proposed activities include baking, sewing, painting, reading children’s stories, visiting the library and, for mother and child alike, learning how to use a computer. Discussions and explanations will be in Swedish, for the sake of language practice.

**Necessary preparations**

Those children old enough to attend preschool or school themselves usually begin in some form of preparatory class. The length of time it takes before they are ready to enter school together with Swedish-born children varies.

Solveig Bylund is the principal of the Hedlunda school, Umeå’s compulsory school for immigrant children requiring extra support. She helped start preparatory classes for refugee children in the town in the mid-1980s.

“We must find other ways of helping the children who’ve arrived here in recent years – they’re so restless,” says Solveig Bylund, a school principal in Umeå.
ular childcare programmes, but that didn’t work very well. So we started a preparatory preschool, Tellus, for refugee children. The staff are trained in working with children from other countries.

“But it’s not just a question of the children needing more time,” she adds. “The parents, too, must be given the chance to learn how we go about things here, and also get some language training.”

Three highly experienced preschool teachers work at the Tellus preparatory preschool centre. In principle they provide regular preschool training but the emphasis is on learning the language. Children are accepted from the age of three. They are often accompanied by their mothers, who can in turn be given help with various things such as homework or filling in forms while they are there.

“Nowadays, Tellus has been incorporated into the Hedlunda school. Having all age groups in one place, from preschool to ninth grade, is a great advantage, says Solveig. Integration of the different spheres of activity at Hedlunda is currently in full swing.

The nature of the work at the school has changed over the past few years, she says. Many Kurdish boys aged between 7 and 15 have arrived since 1996, and they are very restive.

“When they first arrived, they hardly dared move in their seats. But once they felt at home they let it all go and hit the fan. We don’t know exactly why this is. It may have to do with the way their lives have been. Many of them have lived in refugee camps. We think they’ve had to shoulder a great deal of responsibility as they don’t seem to be used to playing children’s games.”

A number of the local authorities have the same experience.

“The boys mostly play war games,” says Björn Fahlander in Lycksele. “They don’t seem to have any experience of playing anything else. Many of the boys are interested in football. But not many can join a boy’s team straight away. The best solution is often a team of their own where the boys can practice things like developing team spirit and abiding by rules.”

The school in Umeå is constantly probing for solutions. Last year, it rented the indoor ice rink once a week so that the children could get exercise and thereby clear their minds of at least some of their anxiety. But Solveig Bylund is worried.

“The damage is deeper than that. We must find other ways of helping these children.”
"We focus on possibilities rather than problems"

In Nynäshamn, municipal social workers Örjan Stenbom and Ulla Tärnell are stationed in the teeming high-rise area of Backlura. They work full-time with teenage boys who risk drifting into criminality. All of them are the children of resettled refugees.

The project, financed by the County Administrative Board, is intended to “prevent 15 young men from developing criminal behaviour”.

“By conducting in-depth interviews with each of them, we try to discover their interests and focus on the possibilities rather than the problems,” says Ulla Tärnell. “Many of them were interested in football, for instance, so we helped them start their own football teams. Some of them had played in ordinary teams before, but it hadn’t worked. The boys were too hot-tempered and too ignorant of the rules. To accept other people’s rules, you have to feel secure in yourself – that’s human nature.”

The aim is to get the boys to want something, to take responsibility for their lives. In many cases, this has worked well. Those who have come through are from stable families. For the others, prospects are less bright – unless they find other adults to connect to.

Young people lack trust in adults

The core of the problem is that these young people do not trust adults, says Ulla Tärnell. In many of the families from the refugee
camps, the parents are illiterate and cannot support the children in their schooling. The greatest problems arise in families where neither the mother tongue nor Swedish has been properly mastered. Also, many adults have troubles of their own. Some withdraw from their parental responsibilities and want the local authority to sort out everything for them, including how the children feel. These youngsters are deprived twice over.

“And they’re the ones who start fights,” says Ulla Tärnell.

One way of helping both parents and children is to provide parental training. Ulla and Örjan are a part of the family’s day-to-day lives and see themselves as ‘co-members’. They help the adults when they have questions and need to decipher complicated official forms, and they keep an eye on the youngsters and tell them off when things get too rowdy.

“We know our boys and they know how we feel about things. Often, it’s enough just to speak to them when they’ve gone off the rails and raise the matter with the parents afterwards.”

Little is heard from the girls in the families. They are not visible to the same extent and are also subject to tougher restrictions at home.

“They’re in a very different situation because of their gender – many of them are married off quite early. Some are engaged when they’re still very young.”

Ulla has been approached by 15 girls aged fourteen and upwards who would like help in finding some form of activity.

“So far, we’ve mostly been working with the boys. In future, we’ll be looking at how we can help and encourage the girls as well.”

Personal relations help young boys

In Borås, too, the local authority is working actively with young boys who risk being marginalised in Swedish society. Youth leader Anders Johansson joined the refugee reception staff on a project basis in 1999 and today works in various ways to help estranged young people. During a previous period as a recreation leader, he made a film together with young people at a youth centre. The films were intended to describe social exclusion.

“It always began with the boys stressing that it wasn’t their own situation they were describing. Then the plot was invariably: young troublemaker goes downtown, throws his weight around,
Children in a new society

meets a Swedish girl and gets invited home for coffee on the sofa with her family. That was the dream.

“In Borås, there were 77 resettled refugees in 1997. I met a lot of guys at the youth centre and got to hear their stories. The Rafha camp seems to have been a terrible place, an affront to civilisation. Al-Tash seems to have been better in some respects. But as far as I could see, there was no great difference as far as the teenagers there were concerned. The worst part of it seems to have been the feeling of hopelessness, of expecting virtually nothing from the future.”

Anders also works with parental groups in need of extra support. As a parent in exile, it is easy to withdraw, he says. Not because you want to but because the children absorb the new language so much faster.

“The teenagers assume a dreadfully important role in the family when the parents are edged out. The parents lack the tools they need to be father and mother. We get together at least ten times to talk things over, the aim being to reinforce them in their new situation. It’s not a case of simply trying to smooth things over. Rather it’s the start of a process that hopefully will bring results. We also invite people from outside to talk to the parents’ group about various aspects of community life.”

Families in the danger zone

In addition, Anders visits the homes of refugee families in the danger zone, i.e., those with sons whose names keep appearing in
police reports. By means of regular conversations and meetings with the family, he tries to help the boys break out of the vicious circle they have landed in.

“It’s important for the boys themselves to establish ties with the community. Otherwise they’ll pass on the same pattern of frustration and alienation to the next generation when they have children of their own.”

Anders feels his efforts are bearing fruit.

“It’s a case of showing respect for one another. The boys know that I keep in touch with the social workers. They’re aware that I pass the information on when they tell me they’ve broken a window or been in a stolen car. But I also pass it on when things go well for them. It’s important for them to know that there’s someone out there speaking favourably on their behalf.”

Research on how children cope

Most children who have experienced severe traumas as refugees recover well in their new host country. The fact that so many come through without any permanent mental damage – despite all the fear, pain and sorrow they have experienced – is due to their ability to adjust and to deal with their emotions. Psychologists call this ability ‘coping’. The child’s recovery is aided by the support he or she receives from the parents and from the community at large.

Psychologists have studied how children tackle difficult experiences by a variety of strategies. Humour and laughter is one way of rendering dire emotions harmless. Another is positive thinking – looking optimistically at the future so as to lift both your gaze and your soul.

A child may also choose a strategy with a less predictable outcome. Daydreams are one such strategy – to sail off in your thoughts, far from painful memories and feelings. Play also offers opportunities for dealing actively with traumatic events. But games in which children act out terrifying events over and over again are not as beneficial.

■ Forgetfulness the most common strategy

What do refugee children in Sweden do in order to recover properly? What ‘coping’ strategies do they use? A new study conducted among three families in Karlstad examined three strategies that are often mentioned by the children themselves:

“In psychological terms, children’s capacity for adjusting and for dealing with their emotions is called ‘coping’.”
• “We have to forget” – denial of painful memories
• “Once our whole family is reunited...” – faith in the healing power of family reunion
• “Once we find a better home...” – hope of finding peace of mind elsewhere.

The strategy that is most widespread among refugee families is forgetfulness, the disarming of traumatic experiences by means of silence. Neither the children nor the parents mention emotionally charged memories to each other. This is a deliberate strategy on the part of the parents and reflects the way they view child-rearing.

The predominant approach among Swedish social workers is that traumatic experiences are best discussed openly – that such discussions have a therapeutic effect. Speak or remain silent – which strategy can best help the family deal with its painful history?

The strategy of silence can sometimes be best, says psychologist Kjerstin Almqvist, particularly when a family has been exposed to only fleeting danger (such as a feared missile attack that perhaps never materialised). In such instances, parents may be wise to protect their children not only from the danger itself but also from the paralysing fear that awareness of it might bring. The children quite simply are not told about the danger threatening them, and their basic security is thereby preserved.

Healthy strategies must be supported
Parents, however, cannot always protect their children from impending danger. Should the family suffer some kind of assault or abuse and the parents then keep quiet about it – that is when the children’s basic security is threatened. The children can no longer trust blindly that their parents will protect them. In such instances, further silence undermines the relationships in the family, says Almqvist.

Local authorities receiving resettled refugees with traumatic experiences must encourage healthy ‘coping’ strategies in the families concerned. This is an important part of both the children’s and the adults’ integration into society. But if progress is to be made, the parents and social workers must agree on which strategy is best – speak or remain silent. This is one of the conclusions of Almqvist’s report.

She underlines the urgent need for further research on ‘coping’ strategies among refugees.
Bounds of Security: The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden
Spelling a new life
Making room for those who have no alphabet

To understand how a lot of resettled refugees feel when they first encounter a Swedish town – their future home – you might like to try imagining yourself on a street corner in Beijing. Street-signs everywhere decorated with beautiful characters you cannot understand. Buses trundling past with cryptic symbols on front and back. People who don’t understand a word of your own language. And what’s the point of looking at the bus timetable, anyway – your eyes can make nothing of it.

Many of the 2,500 people who have come to Sweden from refugee camps in Iraq and Saudi Arabia have never had the chance to attend school for more than a few years. Most of the women have not received any education at all. Their encounter with Sweden in all its textual charm is, literally, dazzling. Not until you view Swedish society through their eyes do you realise what implacable demands it make on all its inhabitants. You have to be able to decipher Western letters and figures. You also have to be able to write. Otherwise your path is blocked by labels, declarations of contents, job ads, signs, forms, billboards, posters, questionnaires, discount offers, weekly bulletins from your children’s school, weather reports and rent payment slips.

Little allowance for illiteracy

Only two generations ago, allowance was still made for the possibility that not all people in Sweden could read. Author Ivar Lo-Johansson has described how most people thought his father an educated man when in fact he had difficulty writing his own name. Illiterates in his father’s time could still function as fully-fledged members of the community. Sweden today does not offer illiterate people the same scope. In fact, it has more or less disregarded the possibility that there might still be someone around who can neither read nor write. Some adjustments have been made in society to improve access for people with physical dis-
abilities or impaired vision. But for the illiterate there are trip-wires at every bus-stop and railway platform, and in every shop. Through the mail-drop in the front door pours even more printed matter for you to trip over.

**Required to achieve**

Swedish integration policy invites new arrivals in Sweden to join the community, and also to lend some of their colour to life in this country. But here, too, there is a tacit condition: you must be able to read and you must be able to write. There is no other way into society and the fellowship it promises.

Sweden does not require any ‘previous qualifications’ of people who seek sanctuary here via the refugee quota. Quota selection is based on people’s need for protection, not on their achievement potential. But once the selected refugees are within Swedish borders, they quickly find out what they are expected to achieve – you must learn to support yourself in our labour market, where employers require every adult to be able to process words.

Sweden’s decision to take in resettled refugees is a humanitarian commitment. Some countries must be willing to rescue people who have been forced to live in the shadows of neglect for such a
long time. Consequently, Sweden has been cooperating with the UNHCR for many years. But this humanitarian commitment is not simply a question of moving a number of people onto Swedish soil. The fact that Sweden has chosen to bring in more than a thousand illiterate people in the space of just a few years implies one of the following assumptions:

• everyone - regardless of age - can learn how to read and write without any great problem. Illiteracy disappears after a few years.
• illiteracy is difficult for adults to overcome. But we have the means of support, the educational aids, the time and the resources to help illiterate persons over the obstacles.
• illiteracy is difficult for adults to overcome. Usually, existing resources are not enough to help illiterate adults achieve their introduction objectives – participation and self-support. Special goals should be drawn up for people unable to read or write. This is one way of acknowledging the degree of difficulty that illiteracy involves.

Experience of teaching both illiterate and poorly-educated resettled refugees around the country in recent years has given all concerned plenty of opportunity to test their own assumptions.

All the teachers have had to rely on their own powers of invention and empathic resources and have borrowed and scraped around among whatever pedagogical aids they could find in order to make progress in their classes. Here are some of the lessons that have been learnt:

Umeå – needle, thread and writing practice

At SFI classes in Umeå, the number of illiterate participants has risen significantly since 1997, reports the principal, Peder Tjäderborn. A teacher from a junior school who specialises in literacy instruction has been a source of support for the other teachers. Practical exercises have also been used to encourage learning, and needlework has been particularly useful in this respect.

The textile craft teacher and the language teacher have worked together at every stage. Together they have developed both drawn and written instructions for each task. Men, too, have displayed a degree of interest in sewing. Many of them found using a sewing-machine great fun. Success in learning how to read and write
Swedish, however, has been very varied, says Peder Tjäderborn. “The differences have a lot to do with age, we’ve noticed. The older you are, the harder it is to make up for lost ground. But we’ve had illiterate participants who have managed SFI passes in the space of just a few years.”

The most important aim for those working with SFI in Umeå has been to get people talking – to bring them up to a level of skill where they can manage a normal conversation in Swedish. When that point is reached, the student has significantly mastered the social function of language.

“Some people speak as though they had had SFI passes for years, but they may not be that good at writing,” says Laila Edström, a study adviser with the SFI programme. “In some cases, we may have to be satisfied with such an outcome. A lot of work goes into making that kind of progress.”

Teachers and municipal refugee staff in Umeå agree that the children should not be allowed to act as interpreters and general helpers for the parents. In many families, such a division is considered natural – someone is good at sewing, someone is a good builder or craftsman, someone else is good at Swedish. The children find Swedish easiest, but if because of this they are chosen to represent the family the adults’ parental role may soon be in jeopardy.

At the same time, however, Peder Tjäderborn feels that we expect too much from people who don’t reach the classroom until they are adults. All the triumphs along the path to literacy should be acknowledged, he says. “The magical SFI pass level – that’s too high, though. Many native Swedes would have difficulty coping with an exam that tough. The rules should be rethought. We could identify different stages in SFI achievement so that the progress of the individual became clearer. Everyone needs confirmation that they’re making progress – if there were more stages along the way, it would become more apparent who was getting on and who was not.”

But the Umeå staff are also critical of what they describe as the narrow view that you can only become properly integrated if you have the requisite language skills and a job: “I think we have to reconsider this,” says Margaretha Bäckström. “We Swedes feel everyone should have a job, that’s where our identity lies. But that may not be the case for all resettled...
refugees. A mother with six children who wants to stay in the home – let her be a housewife. Integration in her case may mean being a good mother to six children, looking after her family properly and being skilled at it. We tend to project our own frustration onto these women precisely because a job and an income are so important to us Swedes.”

**A community wage as an alternative**

Integration policy is also supposed to extend to grandparents who come to Sweden via the quota or due to family ties. But what is realistic in their case? Integration can hardly be about self-support for newly-arrived over-60s.

“W hat targets should you set for older illiterate people who never get access to the labour market?” asks Solveig Bylund, principal of the Hedlunda school in Umeå. “W e’ve been discussing this for years and years. Is a guaranteed citizen’s wage the answer? Perhaps that could be combined with some other kind of contribution, like supervising breaks at school?”

Teenagers with reading difficulties also find things hard when they enter a Swedish school, says liaison officer Inga-Britt Nilsson.

“T hese young people are put into classes that are one or two years below their age group. Y et there are lots of gaps in their schooling that they’ll never be able to make up. S chools have no choice but to follow their own syllabuses. T here’s no scope for going back and giving the pupil time to catch up on what he or she has missed out on in the past.

“T hese children haven’t a chance, with our schools the way they
are today. The tragic part of it is that they’re throwing away several years by attending lessons they can’t keep up with because they lack the proper grounding.

“Some of them will have the energy to go to folk high schools later on, but not many. To be honest, schools today simply do not have a proper strategy for dealing with these youngsters. Yet a strategy is precisely what is needed.”

Nynäshamn – a textile workshop with language training

Busy hands can loosen the tongue. This is something refugee staff have learnt in Nynäshamn, where a textile workshop has been set up for women needing an alternative to SFI. The workshop produces everything from pot-holders and tablecloths to creatively designed ornaments. Everything is for sale in the workshop’s own retail outlet next door. The articles sold in the shop have to be of good quality, and satisfied customers are another essential.

The workshop has had a language instructor of its own who focused on the women’s speech. Sewing work often requires oral instructions that in turn generate questions. The language instructor notices immediately whether or not the women are communicating. At the same, the sale of their articles has given the women tangible proof of their ability to take part in an organised production process.

The workshop was originally run as an EU project. The project was evaluated and the overall assessment was that the method worked well irrespective of the individual’s basic level of skill, and could be applied anywhere. Sufficient resources must be available, however, and the requirement that the project must generate
income may sometimes have to be shelved. The project group was surprised to see how often the women were away sick – their health appeared to be more fragile than the group had supposed. This aspect of the work should be analysed when future projects of this kind are prepared.

SFI in Lycksele
- looking at each other and looking ahead

Lycksele took in a family from the Rafha camp in the 1997-98 period. The small size of the town and the structure of the family have given both municipal refugee staff and SFI teachers some interesting insights into what life is like for people who have had to do without the letters of the alphabet.

SFI teacher Christina Holmgren quickly realised that there was no point in simply starting to write on the blackboard and holding forth.

“My students didn’t even look up. Our gazes never met at first, and the women in particular spoke so quietly that you could hardly hear them. It was as though they didn’t dare take up a space in

“If you take the women’s own skills as a starting-point, it is much easier for them to learn the language,” says Gerd Hedlund of the textile workshop in Nynäshamn.
“The first time one of the women dared read aloud for the whole group, it almost sent shivers down my spine,” says teacher Christina Holmgren.

The room, as though they were on the point of going up in smoke,” she says.

“The most common feeling among the women was – what am I doing here? They felt they had so many other things to do looking after home and family.”

Not all the refugees view Swedish lessons as a gift from the gods. Someone who has any number of practical tasks to perform in the home and then has to sit ‘idly’ in a classroom for the first time may well feel restless.

**Starting with the students’ motivation**

Courses cannot begin with the letters and words of the language – they have to begin with the motivation of the students. What’s the point of my being here? Those who do not have answers of their own to such a question are unlikely to be able to absorb much information.

At the start, Christina Holmgren’s main task was to try to make eye contact with people, to listen to their voices, to locate the source of their pride – and begin discussing the future with them. In many cases, discussing the future is a particularly good way of getting people to appreciate the importance of Swedish. In a few years’ time, when the children are speaking Swedish with their
friends - and possibly with one another - how do you imagine it will feel not to be able to understand what your teenagers are saying?

One and a half terms have passed since the group began work. The fact that progress has been made is clear to all - in the open gazes of the women, in their relaxed way of approaching the teacher to ask about something.

"I myself interpret this greater openness among the women to mean, ‘I exist. There's a place for me here.’ It's great to see. Things have changed enormously since the autumn," says Christina Holmgren.

"The first time one of the women dared read aloud for the whole group, I almost had shivers down my spine."

Christina Holmgren has no illusions, however, about the ability of the women in her group to pass their SFI exam. They will probably never become that proficient, she says.

The women themselves say they want to "talk a lot". They have realised that they need to speak Swedish on a daily basis. The teachers have noted that they are good at sewing, are very clothes-conscious and like cooking. The years in the Rafha camp, when they were not allowed to leave their homes, have made them capable managers of a family household.

### Integration on its own terms

One of the insights gained in Lycksele as regards student motivation is that it is sometimes not enough to speak only with the person concerned. Several of the students belong to larger families that have preserved their home traditions - including the practice of treating one of the elders with particular respect. His views carry extra weight when the family discusses right and wrong, should and must, tradition and innovation. Both the school and the refugee officers have learnt to consult with the family elder when important matters of principle are to be decided. These exchanges have often proved rewarding, and the agreements reached have led to visible results both in the classroom and in municipal offices.

The fact that integration proceeds on its own terms in Lycksele can also be seen in the women's clothing. The women who lived in Rafha had become used to the Saudi tradition of covering themselves from head to toe when outdoors. After a few months in Sweden, several of the women had abandoned their veils while their skirt hems had risen to more European levels. These changes continued until a new group of resettled refugees arrived from the Rafha camp, whereupon a stricter Saudi style of dress
came back. But fashion is once again on the move in Lycksele. Two cultures are converging in this small town where everyone still greets everyone else when they meet on the street. It is not so easy to vanish into the crowd here.

**Borås – mothers and children on courses**

In Borås, both teachers and refugee liaison officers have tried to find ways of reaching women among the resettled refugees who have come from both Al-Tash and Rafha. These women have received only a few years’ schooling, if that. Their lack of education means that many feel they would be out of place on an SFI course. They have also felt torn between their roles as parents and as students. As a result, the ‘Delta Project’ was launched in the town, a programme for mothers with preschool children.

Delta is neither a Swedish course nor a preschool undertaking – it constitutes a first step towards SFI for mothers who might otherwise choose to decline the course. Its leaders are hoping to make the mothers curious and to offer them a good way of getting in touch with the local community. Swedish is to be ‘introduced’ and little more. Delta’s mother-and-child activities give both the leaders and the women the chance to raise questions about upbringing and parental roles in Sweden. This will, it is hoped, pave the way for mutually beneficial contact between the preschool/school and the home later on.

“We aren’t trying to get the women to do as we do in Sweden. But..."
Abdullah came to Sweden in 1997. He had been a guerilla soldier in Iran and had fled to Iraq. When the troubles began in southern Iraq, he and his family fled to Baghdad. The UNHCR had an office there and promised to help them get out of the country. The number of refugees in Baghdad increased rapidly and the staff found themselves unable to cope with such a crush. The family returned to Suleimani in northern Iraq, where they had previously lived for around eight years.

“After a couple of years there, we noticed that we were in considerable danger from the Iranian state. They persecuted Iranian refugees and some were murdered. The UNHCR were active in the area and helped refugees flee. I had a dossier from our time in southern Iraq and I was still able to use it. The UNHCR interviewed me and I told Abdullah Karimi, Uppsala

"Just about any kind of job would do"
them I wanted to get out. Terror actions against Iranian Kurds in the town continued. I was sent via Baghdad and Jordan to Sweden. My father-in-law and other relatives were waiting at Arlanda Airport. Since then, other relatives have come here.”

Abdullah knew little about Sweden except that the country had taken him in. He also has a relative or two in Norway but preferred to come here.

“Soon after our arrival, we were summoned to take part in a programme once a week for 13 weeks. We were then given a lot of information about Sweden, about its history, how the laws work, culture and traditions here. That was really good.”

All the forms to fill in and the information material to read are the hardest part for newcomers, says Abdullah. His social worker has been a great help.

When the family first arrived in Uppsala, they had to live in a walkthrough flat. They all found the situation unpleasant, with people looking at them strangely and no-one inviting them in as was the custom in their own country.

“But things got better when we moved to a proper flat. The atmosphere here is very different.”

Abdullah finds learning the language difficult and is unhappy at not being able to get work.

“Life is boring when you don’t have a job or something to do. But we’re hoping for a better future. I have six children, of whom the eldest is eleven. The children have settled in pretty well, so we plan to stay put.”

Abdullah received five years of schooling in Iran. He does not have any trade in particular.

“Any kind of job would do, I don’t dream of anything special. I practise my Swedish and do a bit of computer work, but I haven’t done any job training yet. Best of all would be a place on a course of some kind leading to a proper job.”
we raise subjects they recognise outside the programme. Our goal is to help them cope better with these kinds of everyday situations whenever they crop up,” says project leader Monica Kjell.

The Delta leaders, the mothers and the children have together practised taking buses, shopping, using the phone, handling Swedish money, making reservations, etc. This is called experience-based training. No school desks, no textbooks – just hands-on practice. The staff have been partially helped by the use of teaching material from the town’s special school for the intellectually disabled. The base for the project has been a five-room flat with a homelike atmosphere, but there have been plenty of excursions into the town.

An evaluation of the Delta Project in 1999 showed mixed results. For a time it was difficult to find interpreters, for instance, but the programme is still developing.

Simple but complicated drawings

For Swedish teachers, a natural means of getting closer to students is to use drawings. If you are unable to communicate through speech or the written language, at least you can draw in order to make yourself understood. But the refugees’ drawings have been a source of puzzlement for the teachers in a number of local authority areas. When they have asked the adults to take a wax crayon and draw themselves, for instance, the results have been strikingly simple. Some middle-aged refugees have drawn stick-figures with a head, arms and legs but no body – a ‘head-
“The drawings illustrate a clear difference of cultural emphasis,” says Kjerstin Almqvist.

Psychologist Kjerstin Almqvist in Karlstad offers an explanation: “What stands out from these drawings is a clear difference of cultural emphasis,” she says. “In Sweden, we have a culture that centres on the individual. This preoccupation with the individual begins early – at preschool, children learn to distinguish their own egos from those around them. The idea is to strengthen the child’s self-image. Children are encouraged from a very young age to ‘draw a funny figure’. Every effort is encouraged, every drawing that looks like a ‘figure’ is acknowledged and the child is congratulated.

“The person in this case who has drawn a ‘head-footer’ as an adult comes from a ‘collective’ culture, where family and community ties are the important thing. He wasn’t trained to draw as soon as he could hold a pen. His individual creativity has not been encouraged and exercised in the same way as in our culture. People in his culture acquire their worth through the group. The constant individualizing that is such a feature of Western society is not reflected there. We in Sweden have become so used to our way of looking at things that we find it hard to conceive of any other.”

People in a collective culture are more likely to be skilled at drawing patterns and abstract forms. In many Islamic cultures, por-
traying people is considered out of place, notes Kjerstin Almqvist. “So these teachers have seen with their own eyes how an adult draws a picture of himself for the first time in his life. It is only natural for him to draw a head-footer.”

Ingrid Skeppstedt, an educator, has been working with illiteracy for many years. She is careful about using drawings in her lessons. “Sooner or later the students realise, ‘Help, I draw like a child!’ This may affect their confidence and their further progress in class. Fortunately, you can improve people’s drawing skills quite quickly. Not being accustomed to drawing people is no great obstacle in the long run.”

**Data bank on illiteracy**

Many of those who have been working with illiteracy in recent years have called for professional help in choosing the right way to teach illiterate adults. Sweden now has a data bank to provide this kind of support to teachers, educators and researchers. The National Center for SFI and Swedish as a Second Language opened in 1998 as the result of a government commission. It is located at the Stockholm Institute of Education and has lists of literature and research about teaching methods. The Center also organised a symposium on illiteracy in the autumn of 1999 when a network of active teachers and researchers was set up. Further information about the Center, the symposium and the network are available at www.lhs.se/sfi. The Center is currently being run on a project basis until the spring of 2001.

In a recent book published by the National Center, entitled Svenska i tiden (‘Swedish In Our Time’), linguist Qarin Franker has some words of comfort for the tired and weary:

“Those of us who work with illiterate people often ask ourselves: Why do so many people find it difficult to learn how to read and write? Is it us teachers who don’t know how to create effective, interesting teaching environments or is it the participants who don’t understand or cannot be reached by the methods and content we have chosen for them? Or could it be that they simply don’t want to learn?”

Even specialists, it seems, may sometimes feel drained by the task before them: helping people to make the most of their democratic right to learn how to read and write.
Legacies of war and torture
Pictures and dialogue capture indescribable pain

For a long time, the municipal refugee reception service will constitute the refugee’s main link to Swedish society. The ability of individual case officers to recognise the symptoms of critical disorders may be a decisive factor in determining whether refugees quickly receive the treatment they need. In fact, one of the goals of the introduction programme is to address illness and offer care and rehabilitation.

In the case of larger local authority areas with regional hospitals within easy reach, access to care and treatment seems satisfactory.

In Umeå, refugee officers view the good contact they have with the psychiatric care service as an asset. On the whole, the staff there are largely familiar with the problems as the refugee reception office actively distributes information about refugees. The doctors, however, are hard to reach – they live in a world of their own and seem to find it difficult to see body and soul as one, say refugee reception officers.

In Luleå, collaboration with the Adult Psychiatry Clinic has been successful. In the child psychiatry field, a number of therapists have been specially trained to work with refugee children.

Refugee reception services in Karlstad, Uppsala and Örebro are also very pleased with the crisis and trauma clinics run by the Refugee Care Centre and the county councils.

Learning to get by on your own

Smaller local authorities have to manage on their own, and seem to be coping. In Skellefteå, refugee reception staff say they are served well by the area’s regular psychiatric service and medical centre. Lycksele has a psychiatric care clinic for children and adults and the school has a resource team of its own for looking
after children in crisis. Local refugee liaison officers have been given special training so that they may recognise symptoms more easily and know how to deal with them.

Nynäshamn is largely satisfied with the local psychiatric care clinic and turns to Stockholm and the Red Cross Centre for Torture Victims when problems arise that are too difficult for the regular care service to deal with.

Some local authorities have difficulty persuading the local psychiatric care clinic to accept their patients. “You have to be really ill to get treatment,” say staff at the refugee reception office in Borås. Instead, they have made use of the Red Cross rehabilitation centre in Skövde, with excellent results. The centre has long experience of torture and trauma victims.

In the case of Karlshamn, the nearest major hospital is located in Malmö. As the refugee reception service finds it difficult to get its patients accepted there, it is looking around for alternatives. Art therapy is one such alternative (see below).

A problem widely encountered is that the term psychiatry carries a negative charge for many refugees. It may take time and lengthy discussions before the person who is ill is prepared to allow staff to dispatch a referral on his or her behalf. Even medical care and doctors in general may trigger a negative response in refugees with traumatic memories, for instance of torture carried out by doctors in the service of their country.

Pictures as language and therapy

In Karlshamn, the difficulty of getting assistance from the hospital in Malmö led refugee staff to begin looking around for alternative ways of helping resettled refugees with trauma problems. They needed treatment for six young men who had spent seven years in the Rafha camp before coming to Karlshamn. Some of them were illiterate. All had refused to take part in the war, had fled from Iraq and had ended up in the Rafha camp. They had been through harrowing times, both during their flight and in the camp. Conditions in the camp were tough, not least for young men.

Refugee reception staff in Karlshamn noticed that they were in poor shape but were unable to reach them through conversation or other traditional methods. They decided to try alternative means, and art therapist Mia Gustafsson was brought in on a trial basis. Over a period of two terms, the men were to work through
The room in which the men painted eventually became a gallery of emotions.
their emotions and experiences by producing pictures, and eventually adding texts as well. An SFI teacher and an interpreter were also involved.

Mia Gustafsson started slowly and carefully so as to develop a climate of confidence and motivate the young men to paint. This proved easy – all of them displayed an immediate interest. Mia emphasised that this was not just a painting course but a course of painting in the pursuit of self-knowledge.

**Interpreters help them talk**

The first task for the men was to reproduce some kind of recollection from their native country. Many emotional pictures resulted, full of sadness and longing. Also, with the help of the interpreter, the men spoke constantly about the symbols in their pictures.

The next step was to try and paint the traumatic experiences they had been through. This gave rise to discussions about anger, grief and other emotions of a threatening nature. For a while, the men vented all their anger on Swedish society, the people of Karlshamn and everything that was not as it was “at home”.

One of the young men painted the same bird over and over again. He himself wondered about this theme, and why he kept returning to it. Finally he was able to put it into words – it was he himself he was painting, a wounded bird who was nevertheless on his way somewhere.

“The mood changed as we worked, the men became more open,” says art therapist Mia Gustafsson.
Before undergoing art therapy, the young men found it difficult to discuss their feelings with either of their two social services officers. Also, they tended to keep to themselves. But as the therapy progressed, the mood gradually changed. Finally, they were having long talks both with one another and with the two officers, both about practical matters and about their grief and their longing for their mothers and everything else they had left behind.

During the year, two hours of Swedish tuition were added to their weekly programme. This proved too little – the men had become motivated and wanted to study more.

While the art therapy course was in progress, the group had a part of the building to itself. The painting room was not used for any other purpose. It became the six men’s own room and the paintings could be left on the walls from day to day. Sometimes the men went in to look at them and reflect, even outside school hours.

“That room with their own pictures holding so many memories for them became something of a sacred place for those six,” says Mia Gustafsson. “Like a reproduction of their inner life.”

**Eager to tell their stories**

In Uppsala, too, a form of art therapy has been used as a way of describing emotions and events. A group of men who had spent seven years in the Rafha camp painted pictures of life in the camp, full of cruelties and dangers (see chapter on the significance of camp life).

“These are terrible pictures and these men are in very bad shape. But they were bursting to tell what they had been through, both in words and pictures,” says Manda Björling, a teacher who wrote down their stories with the help of an interpreter and combined it with their illustrations.

In Karlstad, a group of traumatised refugee children were given the opportunity to draw and paint together with a psychotherapist as a way of dealing with the experiences they had been through. In all, 48 children took part in the Picture Workshop project. Most came from Yugoslavia (27 children) and from ‘Kurdistan’ (13 children). “The aim was to give each child a voice, a chance to make his or her story known, and to give children who had experienced violence and danger an opportunity to deal with these experiences,” write project leaders Margareta Brandell-Forsberg and Kjerstin Almqvist in their report on the workshop.

Apart from drawing and painting their mental images of the
events and difficulties they had encountered, the children also talked aloud to each other about what was in the pictures. The therapists concluded afterwards that the children had become better equipped to deal with the distress they had experienced, and that sharing their recollections with other children had been beneficial. This had made their experiences less threatening. The therapists’ conclusions were confirmed by the children’s own comments about the project. Several of the children described afterwards how they were no longer re-experiencing painful memories. Others felt the symptoms were still there but that they no longer upset them to the same extent.

The project also demonstrated the importance of school health care services and others keeping track of what kind of shape all the refugee children in their area are in. The Picture Workshop project revealed a number of cases where the children had been through traumatic experiences that had been unobserved by both school and recreation centre staff. Other children, who were thought to have come from war zones, had instead been spared any kind of traumatic experience.

In the authors’ judgement, about half of the children in the project badly needed help in working through their experiences. This kind of help can be instrumental in liberating the mental energy that children need to develop normally, to adjust to society and to build up a positive identity in their teenage years.
Mansour Jamshidi, Luleå

“It takes time to learn how a new culture works”

Mansour came to Sweden and Luleå three years ago, after having lived in the Al-Tash camp for 17 years. He is married and has two sons and a daughter who were all born in the camp. As his parents had been living in Sweden for some years, he was keen to be sent to the same country. He says the active involvement of his parents in his case helped him to gain his freedom – his father contacted what was then the Swedish Immigration Board and pleaded for Mansour to be brought here.

Mansour was 11 when war broke out and his family were forced to leave Kurdistan in Iran.

“I’ve lost my life. Before the war, we had everything and we never needed to worry about money. In the camp there was nothing, only sand.”

He lived there with 20 relatives sharing three rooms and a kitchen.

“In the early 1980s, everyone lived in tents. After a few years, people were able to fetch water with the help of a donkey. They started building houses out of
“It takes time to learn how a new culture works”

Mansour Jamshidi, Luleå

“Mud.” At the time, 45,000 people were living in the camp, which is 6 km long and 3 km wide. It still houses about 12,000 people, Mansour believes. There was no school in the camp in the early years, but in 1988 people got together to build a room that could be used for teaching. There were no textbooks, but the children had notebooks in which to write characters. After a few years, desks arrived along with a few books from the Red Cross.

Worse after the Gulf War
Following the Gulf War, the situation in the camp steadily deteriorated, says Mansour. Inflation meant that the allowance the family were given to live on for a month was only enough for a few eggs. The men had to go out and look for ways to earn money so that they could feed their families. Mansour learnt how to sew and set himself up as a Kurdish tailor, sewing clothes by hand and earning his living.

“I had to leave the camp to find work. There was barbed wire all round the perimeter. You had to have a pass to travel to town. We got up at four in the morning and started to queue for passes. I worked as a tailor for 12-14 hours a day every day. For six or seven months we sewed clothing that the Red Cross distributed. Then we weren’t allowed to do that any longer.

“People from the Red Cross often came to the camp. I’d learnt English there and worked for them as an interpreter.”

Queue to borrow a dictionary
One of the men in the camp, an English speaker, acted as a teacher for the others, among them Mansour. There was a grammar book and a dictionary in the
camp. After a wait of several months, you could borrow the dictionary for a week to copy out words or make notes from. In time, further copies became available, from the Red Cross.

Mansour’s parents paid 3 dinars a month for their son’s English lessons.

“Once I’d learnt English, I tried to get out of the camp through the Red Cross. But that didn’t work.”

He was interviewed three times by the UN without being selected. On the fourth occasion, he was told that he had been accepted. The time it took for interviewees to be informed of decisions varied considerably.

“We called it ‘the game of chance’. Some people were informed after three weeks, others had to wait seven years. I think this was due to the way the UN people in Baghdad worked. Karin from Sweden helped me, she kept plugging away.”

Work – a means of survival

Mansour got married in the camp when he was very young, partly on the advice of his father – married men with families were not expected to join the Kurdish guerrilla forces.

When the children arrived, he began to think over his situation. Were they all fated to spend their lives in the camp and grow old there? He himself learnt to make camp life bearable by being active – teaching English and first aid and working with a health committee. There were sometimes accidents at the camp, including gas explosions. Several women died in such explosions while baking bread. The gas also caused burns.

Life in Sweden has involved a complete metamorphosis for Mansour.

“You have to learn everything all over again, from the bottom. It takes time to absorb a new culture, to learn what it’s like to live here.”

To the benefit of the children

He has no intention of leaving Sweden. The children already speak to one another in Swedish and he does not want them to have to start all over again, in a new country. But he is not optimistic about his own prospects. He has visited the employment office every week but never found anything. He dreams of becoming an engineer and has discussed this with his mentor. To become a computer engineer would take him 10-12 years. He rejects the idea out of hand.

“I’d be useless to the children. They want things now, today. They want to buy TV games, go to McDonalds, things that they see other children do. But we have money problems and count every crown. We were given a housing loan of 34,000 crowns when we arrived here. That’s always on my mind, it’s a debt that has to be paid back.”

Mansour wants to get ahead, he says, but has difficulty concentrating at school. For some reason it was easier to study English in the camp, with his friends.

“It gets me down when things go badly, I want so much to succeed. But I’m hoping that the children will find their way in society and that we’ll be good citizens for Sweden. We’ve been given our freedom and medical care, and many problems have vanished. But new ones have cropped up in their place.”
Organisation
Planning for the unforeseeable

Organisation - planning for the unforeseeable
The organisation of municipal refugee reception varies in form. In decentralised areas with district councils - such as Örebro and Uppsala - each council may be responsible for parts of the refugee reception operation. Other parts are centralised, such as the provision of accommodation and of courses about how Swedish society works.

Local authorities like to organise language training centrally – the more students, the easier it is to divide them up into suitable groups. In this respect, the larger local authorities are in a better position.

Refugee liaison officers in small local authority areas tend to sigh at the size of their SFI undertaking when the subject is raised. Groups are supposed to be divided up according to the capabilities of the different students. A well-educated person already skilled in languages needs one type of course. Someone with a limited amount of schooling provided in a refugee camp needs another where they can study at their own pace. Group divisions may be even finer. In large areas, the local authority tries to get people with different mother tongues into the same class – so that Swedish becomes their common language.

Large local authority areas may also be able to employ regular staff with special kinds of expertise – for instance in dealing with illiteracy. None of the local authorities in the present study are large enough.

Vivalla - all offices under one roof
In the council district of Vivalla in Örebro, another type of centralisation is currently being tested – for the sake of the clients. As of now, neither refugees nor anyone else need travel through the town to reach their local social insurance office, employment
office, immigrant and refugee office or social services office. All these offices are now housed in a panoramic office landscape in Vivalla. In other parts of Örebro, and in most local authority areas, relations between refugee reception services and employment offices tend to be strained. The irritation is often a result of the employment office’s insistence that refugee job-seekers must have an SFI pass, otherwise they will not be registered. In Vivalla, however, the authorities have declared their determination to finally find work for chronically unemployed persons. They are taking joint responsibility for achieving this aim and are also seeking the permission of refugee clients to declassify their cases, which would mean that officials could freely discuss new proposals and solutions.

In contrast to Vivalla, local authorities like those in Uppsala and Karlstad – and also parts of Örebro – have had to build up labour market departments of their own to find employment and work training opportunities for job-seekers that the Employment Office refuses to help. Many local authority staff are wondering whether the proper function of the Employment Office is to promote or prevent the exclusion of people from the labour market.

**Luleå - refugees a part of local democracy**

The aim of municipal introduction programmes is to help refugees become active members of Swedish society. In Luleå, the local council has opened up its political decision-making process to enable refugees and immigrants to have their say. There is now
an immigrant council in the area. This body holds regular meetings attended by municipal commissioners as a matter of course. Its proposals and comments are reported to the municipal council executive. Other members of the immigrant council have been recruited from the various immigrant and refugee organisations in the area.

In other parts of the country, newcomers and refugees are expected to achieve participation and a genuine say in community affairs in the same way as other members of the community - via the established political parties.

**Borås - a tailor-made solution**

Local authorities willing to take in resettled refugees sign an annual agreement with the National Integration Office specifying how many places will be involved. In practice, however, the regulated immigration of resettled refugees seldom works out as contracted. A local authority that agrees to keep 150 places open may get 50 during the year. Another year, when the need is greater, it may be asked to take in 200.

“When you're working with refugees, you just never know in advance,” says Liisa Larsson, the principal planning officer in Borås.

The number of refugees is not the only thing that alters from year to year. Refugees' needs tend to vary considerably. Borås has decided, therefore, to maintain a permanent organisation for refugee reception that is small but fleet-footed. As soon as it hears

“*In practice*, the controlled refugee quota is seldom as controlled as the authorities intended.”
that a new group of refugees is in the offing, this minimal team finds out what special needs the group has.

Not until then - when the refugees' needs are known - does it begin drafting fresh workers into the reception set-up. It offers jobs on a project basis and hunts around for enthusiasts with the requisite skills.

Borås has found that this kind of staffing procedure works well, says Liisa Larsson. Those who apply for project jobs are people who are well motivated and have a healthy appetite for the work involved.

A precondition for maintaining this type of organisation is that the refugee reception service is allowed to keep its budget allocation from year to year. The entire operation on behalf of immigrants and refugees in Borås is financed out of the government grant that the local authority receives for its introduction programmes. If the office is able to keep down its costs and wages in a particular year, the unused funds are deposited in a special municipal account. When the operation is under greater financial strain, the office is allowed to draw on this sum instead of having to apply for fresh funding.

"To tell you the truth, we're currently using the money left over from the year the Bosnians arrived. Borås invested heavily in their introduction programmes, but in point of fact they are among the less resource-consuming refugee groups. We were able to keep down staffing throughout that period. If we hadn't had that money now, we wouldn't have been able to provide the new groups that have arrived since with a decent reception programme. The normal introduction grant is not enough to introduce people with such neglected needs. People with a limited education need to be supported with extra resources for quite a time. The government grant should take into account the fact that their needs are of a completely different magnitude," says Liisa Larsson.

This view is echoed by most of the other local authorities - that the funding for introduction programmes is insufficient in the case of people who have spent long periods in refugee camps without being able to acquire either an education or a profession.

These refugees have considerably more ground to cover before they can become self-sufficient and active members of the community.

"The introduction grant should accommodate the fact that these people's needs are on a very different level."
Houma Dawlatkahi came to Sweden in April 1997 together with her husband and five children and her husband’s ex-wife and their children. They had lived in Al-Tash for 18 years. Now all ten of them live in Luleå.

“We often slept out in the open at night as it was so hot, often 39 degrees. It was very dirty, too, and all the children had diarrhoea. My little girl had diarrhoea for three years. The doctors cured her when she came to Sweden.”

For the womenfolk, the camp was a prison, says Houma. They were forced to remain indoors.
“I looked after the children, nothing else. Iraq is not like Sweden. Women are allowed to go out to work here, but not there.”

When Houma was 15, she married a cousin in the camp. The couple soon separated and she remarried. She had five children by her new husband during their time in the camp, and the oldest daughter is 12. She now has a sixth child as well, a little girl who was born in Luleå.

The children forget their Kurdish
Houma’s mother is also a local resident, having come to Luleå in December 1999. Every day, she grieves over her son who lives in Iran, has eight children and no money. Her brother has now been given a case number, says Houma, and may be allowed to come to Sweden.

None of Houma’s children went to school in Al-Tash.
“We didn’t have much money to pay for that kind of thing. And my children are not very good at Arabic, either.”

All the children are happy to be living in Luleå. They speak Swedish, not Kurdish, laughs Houma with a small grimace.

“Sometimes I learn a bit of Swedish from my eldest daughter, but it’s difficult as she has already forgotten her Kurdish.”

Houma herself has not had time to study much Swedish. She went to school for a year after her arrival in Sweden and was then absent for a year on maternity leave. She is currently doing a municipal adult education course. Her language studies are going well, better than her husband’s, she says, not without a touch of pride.

No money for medicines
“He finds it difficult to get Swedish into his head, he can’t read or write.”

Her husband tried to augment the family income by selling fabrics when they lived in the camp. But the money was too little all the same.

“We couldn’t afford to buy medicine for one of our girls, so she died when she was ten months old.”

The family loathed the camp. The worst part was the lack of freedom, says Houma. Being without everything – money, food, medicines – meant that they all longed to get away.

“Sometimes there was nothing for the children to eat. The rice didn’t always smell very good.”

Yearns for her brother
The family were settled in Luleå by the Migration Board (formerly the Immigration Board). Houma likes their flat and is grateful to Sweden for taking them in.

“I missed my mother and my brothers and sisters and cried a lot when I was expecting my baby. The brother who is still in Iran is my mother’s eldest child and she’s constantly in tears from missing him so much.”
“The lack of freedom was the worst part”
Quickly out to work
Luleå unleashes the productive forces

Daily work at a proper workplace makes language training easier. This view is widely held by those local authorities that have taken in resettled refugees. Many feel that the daily combination of studies and practical language training at a workplace pays good educational dividends. Newcomers learn the language faster as a result of this kind of blend. In Luleå, there is a strong belief in the benefits of finding a job as soon as possible after arrival - and not just as a prop for language training. Gainful employment also has an important psychological aspect, says Solveig Eriksson, head of the Immigrant Service Office in Luleå:

“People who come to us as refugees often say they want to do something active themselves, not just have to accept what they’re given. It’s important, too, for people to have a sense of their own capabilities, to make a valuable contribution and to be acknowledged for this,” she says.

Visible results improve self-esteem
In Luleå, refugee officers try to get newcomers into language training programmes within a month. A month later, most of the adults are able to enter the labour market.

Work itself strengthens people’s self-regard when they see the results of their efforts. This belief in the beneficial effects of a job characterises Luleå’s introduction programmes for resettled refugees. Here, the results of the refugee’s work are clearly visible to all. Resettled refugees in the town have built a large-scale riding centre with guest stables for 60 horses, refurbished a giant red wooden training hall on the premises and erected a judge’s tower for supervising riding competitions outdoors. In addition, the newcomers have restored an old northern Swedish homestead, paying careful attention to detail and tradition in their work. This series of building projects has been under way since 1991.
It was the local authority that commissioned the renovation work at the riding centre and the premises are leased by the local riding club. For the project to be approved, the local authority had to negotiate with the trade unions representing construction workers and painters. The discussions were initiated by the Immigrant Service Office and the local union organisations gave their blessing to this unconventional project. The work supervisors were recruited from the building trade and were given a dual task – to coordinate the work and to talk Swedish with the workers.

Solveig Eriksson emphasises the importance of a good relationship with the local unions if the combination of a job and language training is to work.

“We never go in where people have been dismissed or where employers could otherwise recruit staff. Our talks with union representatives have been constructive. We try to find solutions that suit us both and sometimes we ourselves have to revise our plans. We may be allowed six places, for instance, instead of eight – you just say thank you, we accept.”

Construction work is hardly the ideal form of introduction for all new arrivals. Not all are born carpenters or painters. The riding centre project has been one of several alternatives.

“The jobs must help people develop. We always consider the individual and his or her own capabilities.”
Individual and his or her own capabilities. If someone has particular qualifications, we begin by looking for work or a project where they can be put to use,” says Solveig Eriksson.

“We look for regular everyday work which allows you to become acquainted with ordinary people. It’s good if the job gives you a chance to practise your Swedish in a natural way, but it’s as least as important to get as true a picture as possible of Sweden and Swedish working life,” she stresses.

The procedure in Luleå is that each refugee is given the opportunity to help plan his or her own future. These discussions are also attended by a refugee case officer and guidance officers from the municipal adult education programme and from the employment office. The discussions range over things like training and education, hopes and plans for the future and any health problems the refugee may have.

In each case, it is the newcomers themselves who decide when they are ready to begin work.

“We talk it over together, and when he or she feels the time has come we visit the workplace together and give it a try,” says Solveig Eriksson. “If it seems a bit premature, we wait a while longer.”

A certain command of Swedish is required if the job training is to

“We try to find regular everyday work that allows them to become acquainted with ordinary people.”

One of the tasks was the restoration of a traditional northern Swedish homestead.
be meaningful, she adds. Someone who is to work in a machine shop, for instance, should know the names of the most common tools.

**A double-edged process**

The Immigrant Service Office is not interested in contrived jobs, only in work that corresponds to a regular position. To ensure the widest possible range of available jobs, the office negotiates with the local authority, voluntary organisations in the area, and, in recent years, with private industry as well.

The idea is to find the kind of project work that leads on to further employment, and also to provide the refugees with Swedish certification of the professional skills they often possess when they arrive.

“Work at ordinary workplaces is a good way of influencing attitudes,” says Solveig Eriksson. “Other employees get the chance to see that people aren’t strange simply because they come from another culture.”

Work also offers other advantages – those who have held employment can later become eligible for unemployment benefit via an unemployment fund. Once you have held a job, you can also count on the assistance of the employment office if you need a different job or retraining later. A job, in other words, opens the door to the Swedish welfare system.

**Justice for all**

The Immigrant Service Office in Luleå seeks to support newcomers both at work and in their studies. This may mean anything from emergency measures at short notice to regular discussions with the individual concerned. The municipal adult education office reports every week to the Immigrant Service Office on absentees from the Swedish language course. This helps case officers discover if someone is in need of extra support.

“We find out the reason why the person has been absent,” says Solveig Eriksson.

The same applies in the job field – there is always someone who is off work for a good reason. But sometimes people simply lose the inclination to work and fail to turn up. This kind of behaviour finds no favour with Solveig Eriksson and her colleagues, who employ both persuasion and motivation in seeking to reactivate both the dispirited and the recalcitrant.
Experience in Luleå suggests that it is wise to pursue a firm approach single-mindedly. Staff there tell about two young men who had heard that refugees were not required to work in other parts of Sweden. They felt unfairly treated and didn’t want to make any further effort. The staff at the Immigration Service Office insisted, however.

Six months later, a letter arrived: “Dear people, thank you for being so obstinate…”

“I think that fellow’s a graduate engineer now,” says Solveig Eriksson.
Parents in remote Sweden
Couples discuss their new lives with a psychologist

by Leili Falsafi, registered psychologist

Introduction

In the following, I describe my encounter with two different families: Aref and Asrin from Iranian Kurdistan and their three children, and Philip and Viktoria from Iraq, and their three children. The families are from different countries and their backgrounds differ both as to their situations in their native countries and as to their reasons for coming to Sweden. An experience they share is that both lived in UN refugee camps and subsequently came to Sweden as resettled refugees to start new lives.

My conversations with the families focused primarily on their thoughts and opinions about life as a refugee, on how they experienced their time in the refugee camp and on the way their lives have developed in Sweden. At the time of the interviews, 2-3 years had passed since the families’ arrival in Sweden. How had things worked out during that time? What expectations had they formed? What were they hoping for? What did they fear? Did the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? What did things like ‘happiness’ and ‘dreams’ mean to them?

Both families have been generous about sharing their thoughts and experiences with me. They welcomed me into their homes and expressed gratitude at the fact that someone was prepared to listen to their accounts of what had passed. I have taken their stories away with me, stories containing a certain amount of pain and horror, but also hope and confidence in the future. Some of my questions have been answered and some have been succeeded by other, possibly even tougher questions. What is the best way of helping people in flight? How do you adapt the available help to people’s needs? What principles govern the help we provide when...
taking in refugees? Where do you draw the line between helpful public measures and measures that make people passive, destroy their self-esteem and deprive them of their dignity? How are we to become more sensitive to the people we try to help, whether they are within our own borders or a long way away?

These are not easy questions to answer, and we should perhaps aim primarily at trying to keep them in mind at all times. In the course of our conversations and in going through the interview material, however, I have sensed some possible answers to these questions in the families’ accounts of their experiences.

Before you read about these two families, I would like to emphasize that the accounts are primarily those of the menfolk. Although both Asrin and Viktoria took part in the interviews, their contributions were overshadowed by those of Aref and Philip. Separate conversations with them would probably have given a more complete picture of the families’ situations. I do not mean by this that the accounts would have been different, simply that they would have acquired greater depth and shades of meaning.
Aref and Asrin

Enduring all the hardships for the children’s sake

“The children are our future. It’s for their sake we’ve done it all and it has been worth everything that has happened to us.”

Aref drops his gaze as he says these words. I don’t understand them at the time but I can hear the humility in his voice and sense his dejection. Aref is about 40. He is not sure of his age. His wife, they believe, is a few years younger. The couple sit on the floor and the interpreter and I share the corner sofa with three neatly-dressed sons who sit zapping between TV channels. They are 10, 11 and 13.

Vital to feel secure

I glance round the flat with its large colourful rugs and framed quotes from the Koran on the wall. Outside, the Swedish summer sun blazes down on the high-rise estate where the flat is situated in this medium-sized Swedish town. I wonder how Aref and his wife feel about the calm and quiet, and what they expect from life and their time in Sweden. What is an ordinary day like for them and the children during the summer holiday? “Sometimes they’re out in the yard playing, but mostly they watch TV,” says Aref. “There’s not much I can offer the children in that respect. Swedish children are away on holiday with their parents. We can’t afford that kind of thing. But we’re doing all right. We’re safe and secure. That’s the most important thing, not having to worry about being shot dead at any moment.”

Sought UN assistance

Aref’s and Asrin’s accounts of their lives are full of references to being on the run, anxiety, alienation and persecution. As Kurds in Iran, their rights were curtailed. The revolution and the change of government there made no difference. If possible, the persecution escalated when the Iranian Kurds became pawns in the game during the war between Iran and Iraq. Aref and Asrin tried to go on living in Iranian Kurdistan, but in 1985 they fled to the Iraqi
Bounds of Security: The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden

border when their situation became intolerable. Aref and Asrin have difficulty describing the hardships. Their answers are brief but show that they went through tough times with many problems and fears. They remained at the border until 1991, when other developments and circumstances made the refugee situation there still worse. Aref says this was due to Saddam Hussein, but cannot properly describe what happened.

During this period, the UN began to grow active in the area and Aref and Asrin sought their help. At first they were turned away on the grounds that it was the Iraqis who were to be given first priority, but Aref finally managed to get his name on a list of people seeking help. “From 1991, we were in the UN’s hands,” he says. They were given help with food and with the bare essentials necessary for survival.

The UN still had no refugee camp in the area. At some point in 1994, however, UN staff moved into a military camp where a large number of refugees were accommodated, among them Aref, Asrin and their sons. “The UN gave us a roof over our heads and food, but they weren’t able to give us security and protection. The Iranians launched terror attacks and people were murdered. We were constantly in fear of bomb attacks and hired killers. The UN said they couldn’t guarantee our safety and felt the best thing would be for us to move. But where were we to go?”

Three years later, sometime in the spring of 1997, a UN delegation arrived at the refugee camp to select potential resettled refugees. Aref was interviewed and had to fill in a lot of forms. He and Asrin, however, dared not hope they might be included in the quota.

Seven months later, news came through that a country to the north, Sweden, was prepared to take the family in. “Leaving our part of the world was terrible, but we wanted to give our children the best we could. All my children were born while we were on the run. I want to offer them more than that. Security,” says Asrin, drawing his shawl more tightly round his head. With a grin, he adds that he helped deliver all his children.

Arrival in Sweden

“The journey was full of hope, but during our first week in Sweden we were sad. We felt a sort of happiness, but it mostly had to do with being able to offer the children a future. Otherwise,
things were hard. Grief and joy all mixed up together. We saw that we didn't belong here. Everything here is different. Sometimes it makes you scared. In countries like this, things aren't like where we come from. For instance, you can't count on getting help from your neighbour here,” says Aref in a calm, matter-of-fact voice. “At first, we were very isolated. We didn't know that there were other Kurdish families here. My wife cried a lot. We were refugees in Iraq, too, but it was worse here.”

“Falling behind a thousand times over”

In November 1997, the family arrived in Sweden. Almost three years have passed since then. They have a home, the children go to school and time passes. When did they feel that the family had begun to find its feet in Sweden? Aref considers the question at length, gazing at the rug. The interpreter, Aref’s wife and I all sit looking at him and waiting for his reply.

“I can't say that life is normal here yet. We have no proper routines. Everything is different here. Technological development is incredibly fast and I don't think I'll ever catch up. My wife and I don't speak the language. We're both illiterate. I’m falling behind in Sweden a thousand times over. It takes a tremendous effort for me to perform the simplest tasks. Some of us in this society just have to do our best to keep up. Society can't stop and wait for us.”

Don't want to complain

Aref says that his existence is a laborious one but that he is patient and that they are gradually learning to put up with things. It strikes me that they are both struggling to be brave and patient. They don't want to complain and often say how grateful they are that they were able to save their children from a life in flight and penury and give them an education, and not have to worry about them being shot dead on the way to school. They are grateful to the Swedish Government for offering them so much and looking after them.

During our conversation, Aref’s putting a brave face on things looks increasingly like an attempt to stave off feelings of melancholy and hopelessness. He and Asrin must keep up their courage for the children’s sake. Also, they have spent a whole lifetime learning not to expect any help from the authorities. They cannot, therefore, level criticism and make demands now that they are actually receiving that kind of help. Aref spoke earlier about the
assistance provided by the UN in terms of “being in the UN’s hands”. I cannot help thinking that he now considers himself to be in the hands of the Swedish state. Someone demands things of him and he complies. He neither knows how you make demands on your own behalf nor has the energy to do so. Much later in our conversation, Aref says that he often feels tired and worn out. He says he has tried to explain this to his case officer at the refugee office, to get him to understand that doing practical work and learning Swedish at the same time is too exhausting a task. He feels, however, that his words are falling on deaf ears.

“They insist that I study Swedish in the mornings and do practical work in the afternoon. I want to get a job and earn my own living, but I don’t know if this will be possible. It’s difficult, doing everything at once. I get tired and don’t make much progress with my Swedish. It’s hard, too, for us to learn a new language when we’re illiterate.”

I turn to Asrin and ask how she is feeling these days. She smiles a little, somewhat embarrassed, and describes how she has had severe headaches since coming to Sweden “…which makes things difficult, as everything has to go through your head”.

Children and parenthood in Sweden

“It was for our children’s sakes that we made our way here,” say Aref and Asrin repeatedly at various points in the conversation. They talk as though they themselves were part of a lost generation. All hope is invested in the children and negative thoughts are kept in check by concentrating on the benefits of the children facing a different future in Sweden than they would have faced on the run. Aref often refers in the same breath to the children’s chances of a better life in Sweden and his own inability to keep up with developments. Gratitude and relief at not having to worry about the children’s safety are ever-present, but the more Aref discusses his own and his family’s lives the more apparent is the bitterness and dejection in his voice. He is resigned to never being able to lead a decent life as an active citizen in Swedish society, but also expresses concern at the prospect of not being able to be a fully adequate parent. His greatest fear is that he and Asrin will not be able to help the children get on in modern society.

“I’m not an engineer. I can’t afford to buy my children a computer and I can’t help teach them how to use it. All I can do is give them my support and not burden them too much with my own
problems. They’ve been given the chance to come here. It will then be up to them to make something of their lives here. They must find their own path. Each individual is responsible for himself. That’s how it is.”

Aref goes on to say that most things come right in the end as long as there is love and understanding. “…and it’s for the children’s sake I made my way here.”

I look at the children sitting beside me on the sofa, drinking juice and zapping between the TV channels and wonder how they feel about Aref describing them as the cause of everything their parents have had to put up with. Aref is not trying to make them feel guilty when he describes his own and Asrin’s life in Sweden. At the same time, they are expected to carve out good lives for themselves here, an expectation that they may come to view as a parental demand. They are going to have to nurture their parents’ hopes and furnish confirmation that the parents’ efforts are yielding dividends.

“No-one has asked me what I want”

When I meet Asrin, Aref and their children, I am shortly due to go on holiday for the summer – a time of year that for most of us means a break in the daily routine. We work and lead lives that are more or less bound by routine, and we view time in terms of the future and the past. Aref and Asrin most definitely have a past, rich in memories, and they envisage a future a long way ahead when the children have grown up and gone out into the world while they themselves can exhale and feel that all their trials and tribulations were worth it. Something, however, is clearly missing from the couple’s lives and that is any consideration of the more immediate future. Their days seem to merge into one another and there is not much to distinguish one day from the next. I ask Aref and Asrin about this.

“Someone who has everything can experience time. But I have nothing and for me time is flat. When I do my work training I never do anything without asking first. I don’t know how to do the job, I don’t know the language, I have to keep asking. I notice that I’m behind in all respects, and I feel it. I haven’t time to see what others think of me.”

Aref sounds tired, but for the first time since we sat down, there is a trace of anger in his voice. He looks straight at me and speaks evenly, almost in a monotone. Asrin looks away towards the win-
dow and says little. Aref pauses and appears to recover himself. Then he continues a little more coherently:

“Other people make you feel so rotten and feel so tired that you don’t get a chance to blend in on your own terms. No-one has ever asked me what I want. It’s a kind of oppression. But I put up with it for my children’s sake.”

Once again, I glance at the children to see whether there is any reaction to their fathers’ words. I see none, and wonder if this is because they have heard such feelings expressed many times before or whether it is because they find it a strain to concern themselves with the world of their parents. I ask Aref how he thinks the children feel about the way he describes his life in Sweden. Aref grows silent again and stares down at the rug. “Each individual is capable of doing whatever he wants.”
Parents in remote Sweden

Philip and Viktoria

Do the adults have a future?

“My dream was to see the children going to school with their satchels. Those years in the refugee camp were worth it all. Our children’s future is secure.”

Philip speaks loudly and clearly and pauses from time to time to let the interpreter catch up. His wife is in the kitchen and the children run in and out of the flat. The TV is on and the afternoon programmes are rolling. The son of the family sits in front of the set and divides his attention between the afternoon soap operas and his father’s story.

Philip starts his story at school, as he puts it, and describes the day the security police in Baghdad came for him and took him to a headquarters where he was interrogated about his political leanings, tortured and released a week later. He explains that he has never been particularly interested in politics, but that the security police refused to accept this. On several occasions, he was taken away, interrogated, tortured and released. The situation became increasingly intolerable until finally the family fled.

Philip describes the road from Baghdad to Sweden in some detail. It is as though he has gone through this all before, or he may perhaps have prepared himself for an interview such as this. With the help of pictures, he describes what life was like for them before they were forced to flee. How he had to abandon his workshop, how they lived in a tiny flat where the heat of summer was unbearable, how they sometimes had difficulty finding enough food for the day and how the family’s prospects gradually diminished. Finally, they reached a point where they saw no alternative but to leave the country.

Coping with camp memories

Philip says nothing about how they arrived at the decision to make their way over to the Syrian side, nor about how he financed the escape or found the right contacts for such an expedition. It seems to have been something he arranged in a state of desperation and as a result cannot recall the details. His recollections are
much clearer, however, when he describes life in the refugee camp.

The period up to the family’s arrival was full of fear, despondency and uncertainty as to whether they would be able to escape the ‘long arm of Saddam’.

Camp life

The time they spent at the El Hool refugee camp has left Philip and Viktoria furious about the injustices to which people can be exposed. Philip describes corruption among the camp personnel, prostitution, disease, violence and death. He has numerous examples of the atrocities that took place during the seven years from 1991 to 1998 that the family spent at this UN camp. In particular, he is angry at the Syrians who ran the camp, claiming that a large part of the aid intended for the refugees never reached them but “got stuck in the Syrians’ pockets” instead.

Philip and Viktoria did not think they would have to stay in the camp for more than six months or so. “…But we were duped. Every day, they told us that a delegation would soon be arriving from the United States or Australia, but none ever came. If (the Syrians) lost us, they wouldn’t have been able to make money on us, would they!”

Philip says he felt more oppressed in the camp than at home in Iraq.

The couple were constantly worried about the state of the children’s physical and mental health in the camp. The youngest daughter was born in the camp and spent her first seven years there.

The children attended a school outside the camp premises. “They didn’t want to go to school down there as they got beaten. Here, they run to school.”

Philip was also worried about the children not having the chance to practise any sports, something that Philip considers very important. He dreams that one day the children will be professional athletes.

From hell to heaven

“The UN camp was hell itself and coming to Sweden was like arriving in heaven,” says Philip, lifting his arms skywards as if to thank divine providence.
Parents in remote Sweden

“T he camp was the university of life. W hoever was able to cope with life in the camp could cope with anything.”

Philip goes into further detail about life in the camp and how thankful he and Viktoria were that they had survived it. “You found all sorts there – beggars, prostitutes and university graduates. W e and our children were exposed to hunger, thirst and oppression. L uckily, the children weren’t affected very much by what went on.”

Philip and Viktoria are grateful and glad that Sweden took them in. A particular source of joy is the prospect of a better life for the children. T hings may have been difficult at first, the couple say, but little by little they have carved out a life for themselves here. Philip is confident about the future. H e cannot, however, say anything more concrete about his hopes for his own future. “T hings will work out fine, for the most part. T he important thing is that the children are O K .”

H e repeatedly asserts his determination to learn Swedish and to do his bit in the community. W hen I ask Viktoria how she views her future, she smiles embarrassedly and says she would like to learn how to sew. She says this as though she were describing a long-time dream that will never come true.

- Black and white - no shading

Philip’s presentation of the family’s life in Sweden is on the whole favourable but without nuances. H e has clearly divided up their life and dispatched all terrible experiences into the past. T he refugee camp contained all the treachery and brutality to be found in the world whereas Sweden is a haven of humanity and opportunity. T here are no lights and shades in Philip’s account. T hings seem to be either black or white, good or bad.

I ask him if he has considered the problems that the children may encounter in Swedish society bearing in mind that they are not Swedes. Philips swiftly replies that he does not envisage any problems with the Swedes. Swedes are understanding and humane. T he problems he has encountered have been in relation to other foreigners, principally those belonging to other religious groups that in Philip’s view are fanatical and narrow-minded. X enophobia and racism seem to be unknown concepts to him. “Sweden and the Swedes are good. T hey care about us,” says Philip firmly. “O ther foreigners are the ones I have problems with, our next-door neighbours, for instance.” O nce again, polarisation emerges in Philip’s account. T wo separate worlds are
described, each with totally different qualities, representing different and conflicting values. In this analysis, Sweden is idealised, a land of opportunity and security. What will happen if Sweden, too, lets Philip and his family down? Will this country, too, be painted black as night and be fixed with the same bitter gaze as Iraq and the UN refugee camp? Where will the couple seek hope and faith in the future then?

Neither if nor but

For the time being, though, Philip and Viktoria are happy to be able to live quietly and peacefully in a country that gives them what they need and that, most importantly of all, offers their children a future. What will happen to Philip and Viktoria themselves is something they prefer not to think too much about. Philip uses optimistic words, but only to steer the conversation away from the parents and focus on the children and the children’s prospects.

I reflect aloud, expressing a degree of pessimism. But it is clear that Philip does not want to think in terms of ‘if’ and ‘but’. Instead, he lets himself be interrupted by Viktoria, who has spread a table with Oriental delights. “May we invite you to share a meal with us?”

Reflections

There is much to distinguish these two families from one another, but they also have much in common. While listening to them, I am struck by the fact that their narratives tend to converge the closer they get to their flight from oppression and their lives as refugees. Until then, they led quite separate lives, earned their upkeep in different ways and set store by different things in life. Their rootlessness, fear and desperation as refugees, however, has
Parents in remote Sweden

casted them to place increasing emphasis on their children. The survival and future prospects of the children have become the focal point of their lives. Greater opportunity for the children, though, has meant curtailment of the parents’ own opportunities. To different extents and in different ways, both sets of parents are struggling against bitterness, despair and fear.

Conflicting feelings

They are largely dealing with these emotions by overemphasizing the importance of the children’s future success. Philip hopes and believes that his children will become highly-trained athletes and he stresses the role of Swedish society in this. There are opportunities in this country and they are available to all. Aref is also hoping for a good future for his children, but he places the responsibility for this on the children themselves. “Each individual is responsible for himself,” he says. By the same token, he sees himself as being responsible for his own life, which is a heavy burden to bear as it means that if his life is not as he would like it to be, the failure is his own. This is generating powerful and sometimes conflicting feelings of despair and anger, which he is trying to control.

Parents’ state of health affects children

It is clear however that both families are grateful and happy to be able to lead lives that do not expose them to immediate danger. Also, the hopes they nurture on the children’s behalf are very important for the parents’ own enjoyment of life. There are two risks emerging from this, however. Firstly, the children’s responsibility for the parents’ sense of well-being can prove too much for them, and secondly, we risk losing the parental generation – a generation that is still of an age when its members wish to be active participants, in demand and needed by society. Eventually, the physical and mental health of the parents will be crucial to the children’s future in Sweden. Aref and Asrin, Philip and Viktoria all possess resources and strengths, as do many others like them, even though they may express feelings of fear, frustration and powerlessness. One question among many is how are we to adapt the help we provide so that such people become stronger and feel themselves to be active, potent agents of their own futures?
Summary and proposals
Conclusions of the National Integration Office

This report, Bounds of Security, supplements a study on resettled refugees in Sweden carried out by the Swedish Immigration Board (SIV) in 1997, entitled Status kvot (Status Quo). The aim of the present report is to convey a deeper understanding and appreciation of the issues involved.

The material is presented in journalistic form, so as to supplement the previous report and to approach the issues in a different way. Below, the National Integration Office presents the additional assessments and proposals that this new perspective has generated.

The present report focuses on the opinions and reflections of the municipal refugee officers working with the resettlement of those resettled refugees who arrived during the 1996-98 period. The views of some of the refugees themselves are also presented. The ten local authority areas in Sweden that have taken in more than 50 resettled refugees each during this period have contributed information to the report.

In Status Quo, the Swedish Immigration Board (now the National Integration Office) identified some of the shortcomings to be found in refugee reception programmes and proposed a number of improvements:

- The value of family and ethnic networks cannot be emphasised enough.
- The ‘Sweden Programmes’ must be developed further.
- Swedish health and medical care services are not being given enough information about health checks already conducted.
- Resettled refugees need a longer introduction period.

The National Integration Office fully agrees with the first three points. With regard to the length of introduction periods, we would like to offer an alternative view. Sweden already has one of the longest introduction periods of any country and we cannot in good conscience propose extending it for all new arrivals.
Experience has shown that long introduction periods tend to be counter-productive, and alternative solutions must therefore be found. The National Integration Office would like to offer the following brief viewpoints:

- Refugees who have already settled into the community should be brought into the introduction work. We must work together with them, not simply on their behalf.
- Greater importance should be attached to the refugees’ own networks and local contacts. Local authorities should engage voluntary organisations in the introduction work to a greater extent.
- Employers must relax their requirements with regard to Swedish language skills.

People who are not fully versed in the Swedish language can perform many different jobs that they do not currently have access to. We present these and other opinions below.

Reception of resettled refugees

Sweden has been collaborating with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) since the early 1950s in providing protection or assistance to people in need of sanctuary in a third country. Each year, the Government establishes a refugee quota specifying the number of people Sweden is prepared to take in. The UNHCR collects information about people in various parts of the world whose lives may be threatened or who may be in imminent danger of reprisals.

The refugee quota reflects a changing climate in the world at large. International tension, regional unrest, upheavals and war create emergency situations from which people must be extricated if they are to survive. During the 1990s, therefore, the quota varied in size from 600 refugees in 1996 to 5,000 in 1994 when the Balkan war was in progress.

Resettled refugees who arrive in Sweden are subject to government integration policy, the main goal of which is to ensure that they become self-sufficient, active members of the community. Local authorities taking in resettled refugees are required to provide them with personalised introduction plans adapted to individual needs. Funding is provided by the National Integration Office and is supposed to approximately cover the costs of refugee
introduction programmes. Funding is also provided to county councils for health and medical care.

Local authority access to information

Local authorities receiving resettled refugees need information about their individual capabilities and needs in order to prepare personalised introduction plans for them. There are three sources of information on resettled refugees, but local authorities only have access to one of them. The sources are:

**UNHCR dossiers** on each individual. These are case studies drawn up by the UNHCR to provide background information for the selection of resettled refugees by various host countries. This information is in part confidential and is therefore not released to the local authorities.

**The Migration Board’s records of selection interviews.** On selection missions, potential resettled refugees are interviewed for an hour or two each. Due to the limited time available, the interviews focus on certain specific matters. Interpreting is often provided by inmates of the refugee camp. The proficiency of these interpreters varies considerably as they have often acquired their English in the makeshift circumstances of the camp. Few countries have anything similar to the system of civic registration numbers used in Sweden. Nor is it customary to celebrate birthdays on the same date every year.

The conditions under which selection interviews are conducted in the camps lead to uncertainty about how the information should be interpreted. It should also be borne in mind that many of the interviewees try to give the ‘right’ answers to improve their chances of getting out of the camp. The information gathered in the interviews is stored at the Migration Board offices in Norrköping. Only a part of this information may be routinely passed on to the local authorities. Other kinds of information may be released with the express permission of the refugee concerned.

The third source of information is **the local authorities’ own interviews** with each refugee when introduction plans are drawn up. These exchanges allow a new, more rounded picture of the person to emerge and the information thus acquired may be used by municipal social workers and refugee officers in their work with the refugees.

Documentation of the individual introduction plans tends to vary considerably from place to place.”
The Sweden Programme was presented in the Rafha camp to make it easier for the selected refugees to settle in Sweden.

5.) There is a need for further information both on the situation of the individual refugee and on the refugee group as such. Most of the local authorities feel they would have been able to provide a better introduction plan had they known more about the refugees beforehand. Above all, they report a lack of reliable information about people’s age, health problems and care requirements. This information is essential if municipal reception is to work at all.

Not all of the officers interviewed in the study, however, agree on the importance of more detailed information. Those who are sceptical contend that preconceptions and generalisations may be spread in an unwanted manner if the information is passed on in full. Incorrect data can damage both the individual and the refugees as a group. Information about serious health problems is already provided in a manner that most of those involved find satisfactory.

In the case of information concerning individual refugees, there are legal obstacles to its dissemination in the Secrecy Act (1980:100). This must of course be respected. Medical certificates and other confidential information should not be released to refugee coordination officers automatically. In cases where such information is essential to the placement of the person concerned or to the proper performance of other duties for which the coordination officer is responsible, the permission of the individual must be sought before the particulars can be released. Access to such information is necessary if municipal reception programmes are to work smoothly. A lack of relevant information may in some cases hamper or even preclude a satisfactory reception process.

Proposal: The National Integration Office in consultation with the Migration Board should review the procedures for the transfer of information to local authorities. Local authorities must be provided with the best possible information about individual refugees – their name, age, health problems and care requirements.
There is broad agreement on the need for further details of the refugees’ living conditions to be made available prior to their resettlement in Sweden. Few of the local authorities in this report had a level of preparedness corresponding to the refugees’ needs on arrival. Many of the municipal refugee officers only came to realise what a camp existence of 7-17 years could do to a person after seeing a report from one of the camps on Swedish TV. Had this information been available earlier, the officers would probably have chosen other forms of accommodation for the refugees or other acclimatisation plans for the schoolchildren among them. Also, they might have sought help from psychiatrists or other specialists at an earlier stage.

Virtually all host countries agree that detailed information concerning resettled refugee groups should be supplied to the local authorities that take them in. In Sweden at present, this is not happening to the desired extent. This may be due to fears that such a course might foster prejudice. Naturally, the Swedish authorities must be allowed to pass on information about a refugee camp and how life there has affected the refugees concerned, as well as information about their living standard, educational background and other relevant particulars. Without such data, local authorities cannot adequately prepare individualised introduction programmes.

We also consider it important for local authorities to establish networks so that they can provide information at local level about the refugee groups due to arrive. These networks could encompass the local press, local associations and other relevant players.

**Proposal:** Principles should be established for how information concerning refugee groups is to be provided. In the spring of 2001, Sweden will be taking part in an international conference on the reception and integration of resettled refugees. These issues are on the conference agenda and the aim is to establish international principles for how this kind of information should be formulated.

Have the refugees been given enough information about Sweden?

Resettled refugees’ knowledge about Sweden is very patchy, and sometimes incorrect. In an effort to improve the flow of information, a series of ‘Sweden Programmes’ has been launched – instruction about Swedish public life provided on the spot in the camps. The aim has been to facilitate the arrival and municipal settlement of the refugees. The Sweden Programmes have been commended by a number of local authorities.
Many new arrivals – both resettled refugees and asylum-seekers – believe that Sweden is paid by the UN to take them in. This misapprehension clouds people’s attitudes and leads to immoderate expectations that are sometimes difficult to rectify. The source of the misunderstanding is not known.

Information supplied by relatives plays an important role when new refugees arrive. Being met by a member of your family at the airport is a great help both for language reasons and in that it bolsters the refugees’ sense of security. It is also a help to the municipal officers responsible for their reception. Several local authorities express their appreciation of how the members of the family help one another, both on arrival and afterwards. People with relatives already in Sweden find it easier to settle in and make better progress both socially and in learning the language.

The local authorities try in various ways to initiate the new arrivals into life here. Field visits to the local medical centre, the social insurance office and other places that are a part of everyday life are a highly practical way of providing information, not least when introducing illiterate refugees into the community.

Information should be provided at an early stage in the refugee’s own language. This is a widely held view among the local authorities concerned.

Discussion: Refugees have trouble absorbing information about their new country in the drastically different situation which many find themselves in on arrival in Sweden. Unfortunately, it is also difficult to absorb such facts at the information meetings in the refugee camps, either. People’s knowledge about Sweden naturally varies from refugee to refugee and from group to group. A number of different information programmes have been tested, with varying success. The fact that many refugees believe Sweden receives funds from the UNHCR to cover their costs in full, and that the local authority or the Government are either holding on to or concealing these funds, is by all accounts a serious obstacle to progress in reception work. It should be noted that this is a problem we in Sweden share with other host countries and that it applies both to resettled refugees and to others seeking asylum in the country concerned.

Action: The importance of providing resettled refugees with proper information is fully appreciated and the National Integration Office is responsible for the Sweden Programme information provided to this group. An educational programme is needed that prepares refugees both mentally and in informational terms for their resettlement in Sweden. In
2001, the National Integration Office will be issuing a new, updated version of its information book on Sweden, containing basic facts about life and society here. Among other things, it makes clear how the refugees' stays in Sweden are financed.

Proposal: In our view, the National Integration Office should take a more active part in the selection team trips and selection activities, as it is there on the spot that the introduction process for the individual resettled refugee actually begins. We also consider it important that local authorities with experience of refugee reception be represented on these journeys so that they may prepare the most appropriate kind of reception programme for the group concerned. The National Integration Office is given responsibility for the Sweden Programme.

Divided families

Municipal liaison officers agree that the first thing almost all refugees ask when they arrive is whether the other members of the family can be brought over to join them. Many of the refugees spend much of their time cultivating both the authorities and others who they hope will be able to help them bring over relatives.

These exertions are mentally draining, and family divisions thereby become a major obstacle preventing people from getting on with their own lives, say the liaison officers. Concentration is affected and the refugees’ thoughts are constantly elsewhere. Resettled refugees are even sending a part of the money they live on in Sweden to their loved ones who they know are in a worse position in the refugee camp.

Women, in particular, are hostages to grief and anxiety. They are more likely to have relatives still in the camp, as the criteria for who may leave with the selected family follow the man’s lineage. The woman’s original family has little chance of being selected under the present regulations.

The social significance of blood ties and the extended family is very different in the Middle East. Families share experiences and responsibility as a matter of course.

Many refugees feel guilty about having been able to leave the camp while others have had to stay behind.”
It is also natural for people who share difficulties in life to grow close and to feel unhappy about being separated.

At the Migration Board’s permits department, officials sympathise with the view that families should be kept intact but point out that Sweden applies the same principles as the UNHCR in this respect. Both define a family as parents and children (minors), or what is termed a household unit. These are the family members who are kept together in the selection process.

**Discussion:** It is of course difficult to define what actually constitutes a family. Nuclear family members and close relatives do of course have stronger ties than others. It is often these relatives who are considered for subsequent selection. Experience has shown that resettling all the members of the family at the same time is the best solution. This is no easy matter, but conscious application of the family perspective in the selection process is a vital way of promoting integration.

**Proposal:** Sweden and the UNHCR have everything to gain from making stronger efforts to include those with the closest family ties in each case. Sweden must above all take women’s families into consideration to a greater extent and not simply follow the male lineage.

Reportedly, this is already standard practice in the US selection process.

As part of the Swedish selection process, families must also be clearly informed that those chosen for resettlement are the only members of the family who will qualify for residence permits.
The legacy of war and torture

Many of the refugees who arrived in 1996-98 are in a worse state – more passive and mentally more exhausted – than those who came from the same camp in 1995. This may be due to the destructive feeling that one has been ‘left out’ of the quota along with the fact that the person concerned has actually spent a greater number of years in the camp.

Other factors besides time have a bearing. A person’s educational background is one of the most important factors, according to many case officers. Motivation is important, too – a person who has been politically active and feels that he or she has been fighting for something worthwhile tends to cope better with camp life than those who simply feel themselves to be victims.

Many of the staff working with resettled refugees would like access to general information about the camps themselves. This, they say, would make it easier to understand the refugees’ backgrounds and to provide them with a more suitable form of reception.

In the case of war-injured and tortured refugees, larger local authorities within easy reach of a regional hospital appear to have good access to treatment facilities. Smaller local authorities are having to get by as best they can, but report that they are usually able to provide adequate help.

Psychiatry is an emotionally-charged word for many refugees. It often takes time and numerous discussions before a sick person is prepared to accept treatment. Even medical care and doctors in general may trigger a negative response in refugees with traumatic memories, for instance of torture carried out by doctors in the service of their country.

Discussion: A fundamental principle of Swedish medical care is that it should be available to all. But people traumatised by war and torture can seldom find the help they need in regular medical care. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that specialist care is available to them. It is unfortunate that despite this, several of the centres specialising in the treatment of war-injured and tortured refugees are threatened with closure.

Finding a home

Today, the Swedish authorities exercise almost total control over where resettled refugee families are to live. The National Integration Office chooses a suitable local authority and the
refugee coordination officer there chooses a housing area for the family. Only those families with relatives in a specific part of the country may get the chance to influence the choice of area.

As a result of the housing procedure, refugee coordination officers have a tremendous burden of responsibility. Most local authorities lack proper guidelines for how housing segregation is to be curbed. In the absence of policy decisions, refugee coordination officers have to act as they think fit. Some describe how they are reluctantly contributing to housing segregation as private landlords are refusing to let their flats to refugees. As the officers lack the necessary political backing, the process continues – refugees are forced to occupy council flats. No-one has the time or energy to confront the private landlords on this issue.

A study in Karlstad shows that refugees’ opinions differ as to what may be considered a desirable area to live in. Many of the refugee families are very large by modern Swedish standards. Few rented flats are designed to accommodate families with 5-10 children. Some of the local authorities have turned two adjoining flats into one to create the necessary space. Others have purchased private houses and tenant-owned flats to let to the refugees.

**Proposal:** There is relatively little opportunity for persuading refugees to choose non-metropolitan areas if and when they move on. This kind of problem applies to all immigrants and to Swedes as well. Rural parts are being depopulated. Sweden has not developed sufficiently effective ways of motivating either employers or wage-earners to move to more sparsely-populated areas. This is not easily done via government refugee policy. The right to live wherever you like must be upheld and apply to all registered residents throughout the country. However, more can of course be done in the information field. The fact that Sweden has the same standard of compulsory schooling, district medical care and other public services in other parts of the country besides the metropolitan
areas is something that must be emphasised. This kind of uniform standard is not common in other countries and many refugees are pleasantly surprised at the service levels they find in northern Sweden. Many resettled refugees are genuinely content to live in such places together with the people there, and this is a fact that must be impressed upon others.

Resettled refugees, however, sometimes have special needs that many local authorities do not have the resources to deal with properly. It is important therefore to ensure that the National Integration Office staff responsible for housing are given access to the requisite information concerning both municipal resources and the needs and capabilities of the individual.

The National Integration Office has now produced a brochure, ‘Introduction Programmes and Where to Live’ describing what the choice of a particular place may entail in terms of the individual’s future subsistence and community access.

Meeting the children

Many of the children were born in refugee camps and know of no other way to live. Others came to the camps after fleeing from their homes together with their parents. Many nurse traumatic memories.

All the local authorities provide the children with individual introduction plans, in the same way as for the adults. The interviews that take place when the plans are drawn up are important as they give the child a chance to present his or her own version of events. Often, the family situation as a whole is discussed. Many parents are surprised at how much the children recall.

In the case of the youngest children, several local authorities have arranged activities for mother and child together. This has proved popular and particularly beneficial for the mothers, who often find it easier in such a relaxed family-like atmosphere to absorb all the new things around them.

Children old enough to attend preschool or school on their own usually begin in some form of preparatory class. In principle this resembles regular preschool training but with a degree of emphasis on language.

A number of local authorities note that the children do not appear to be accustomed to playing. Spontaneous boys’ games are usually about war.

"Several local authorities have noted the fact that the children are not used to playing games.”
In some municipal areas, people are worried about the growing problems posed by boys who have come from refugee camps in recent years. One is Umeå, where a special school is looking around for new ways of tackling the problem. Special measures have also been introduced in the Backlura district of Nynäshamn. Social workers have successfully halted the slide into criminality of a number of boys there. The core problem is that the youngsters distrust the adult world, the social workers say.

In Borås, too, the authorities are working with boys in the danger zone, and also with their parents. The boys must establish ties of their own with the community if they are not to pass on their frustration and sense of alienation to the next generation when they themselves have children, according to the youth leader assigned to the project.

In Karlstad, a Picture Workshop was organised for traumatised refugee children there. Among other things it highlighted the importance of school health care services and others keeping track of the shape refugee children in their area are in. There were a number of cases where children had been through traumatic experiences that had gone undetected by both school and recreation centre staff. Other children, who were thought to have come from war zones, had instead been spared any kind of traumatic experience whatsoever.

Most of the children with harsh memories of life as a refugee recover well in their new host country. The fact that so many come through without any permanent mental damage is due to the ability of children to adjust and to deal with their emotions. Psychologists call this ‘coping’.

A new study among refugee families in Karlstad looks at three ‘coping’ strategies that are frequently referred to by the children themselves: denial, family reunion and the hope of finding peace of mind elsewhere.

Local authorities receiving resettled refugees with traumatic experiences must encourage healthy ‘coping’ strategies in the families concerned. This is an important part of both the children’s and the adults’ integration into society.

**Proposal:** Parents in families with traumatic experiences must be given help with their parental roles. The findings of the Karlstad study should lead to action.

School health services should pay special attention to children who may conceivably be suffering from traumatic experiences, and also keep a special eye on withdrawn girls.
The Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education published a book in 1999 entitled Mötesplats Sverige, funktionshindrar och kulturmöten (Meeting Point Sweden: Disabilities and Cultural Encounters) which noted that the number of children from immigrant backgrounds in special-needs education in Sweden had increased. Why this figure is so high today is a question that should be studied.

Education and work

Many of the 2,500 people who have come to Sweden from refugee camps in Iraq and Saudi Arabia have had only a few years of schooling.

In Sweden, it is very difficult to find a job or become active in community life if you are unable to read. Sweden has chosen to take in hundreds of people who lack this ability. But solidarity also implies that the families must be given a chance to function properly in everyday Swedish life. All the local authorities surveyed say that the low level of education they found among the refugees from Al-Tash and Rafha came as a surprise. None of the local authorities had staff on their books who were trained to work with illiteracy. Different methods have been tested in different areas - these are described in the report.

Illiteracy has previously been marginal in the areas concerned, usually only involving the odd inhabitant. Teachers are now being confronted with whole groups that lack training in how to read and write.

In Lycksele, SFI teachers Sonja Gustafsson, Ann-Katrine Flodin-Mena and Kenneth Heldestad have learnt to view their adult students as part of a larger community.
The local authorities in the study suggest that the introduction programme objectives might be made more realistic in the case of these refugees, or that public resources might be increased so as to provide the refugees with a longer and more varied introduction period. This is essential, they say, if illiterate persons are to have a reasonable chance of becoming active and self-sufficient members of society.

The Government Bill, ‘Sweden, the Future and Diversity: From Immigration Policy to Integration Policy’ (1997/98.16), has this to say about the two-year introduction period:

“For some, however, two years is an insufficient length of time if they are to achieve the basic degree (of integration) that is the aim of the introduction programme. This applies in particular to persons with very little schooling...”

The standard grant for resettled refugees is payable for two years. This, together with the Bill’s contention that refugees should be able to reach a satisfactory basic level of preparation for their continued existence in Sweden within two years, has left many people with the impression that the introduction period must always be two years. It is quite clear that the aim of the introduction programme is to make those taking part self-sufficient in the community. People who have never had a daily newspaper on their kitchen table, or have rarely held a pen or a colouring crayon in their hands and who can scarcely make out the number on the bus have a hard time of it in our IT society. They also run into difficulties at school or at the employment office. Over a period of 50 years or so, Sweden has gradually stopped making allowances for illiterate people. The school tests and profile tests we use in education and in the labour market today disqualify such people inexorably and belittle their competence. Illiterate people do not of course lack intelligence – they have other qualities to recommend them, such as social skills and, quite often, an impressive memory. The tests are blind to such gifts and practical applications.

For some people in this category, the road to self-sufficiency is considerably longer and more complicated than for others. A woman with many children has a full working day in the home. In her native country, the idea of her going out to work was probably never even mentioned. In the case of women such as her, the approach currently employed in Sweden will simply not work. The same applies to many others who, for reasons described in the report, have lost their footing in the radically different society they now inhabit. Age is a relative term, and people who are old...
Summary and proposals

in one kind of society may be considered middle-aged in another. Here are a large number of people who – although not incapacitated in formal labour market terms – are so burdened by harsh experiences, traumatic memories and their inability to read and write that entry into the job market must seem a virtually unattainable goal.

Longer introduction periods unfeasible

By international standards, the Swedish introduction period for refugees is very long. Thus it is difficult to recommend a blanket extension. This also applies in the case of the refugee category described in the report. In other countries that have taken in people with similar backgrounds and experiences, including illiterate persons, the majority have managed to find work within 6-12 months. It is of course hard to make comparisons between countries with radically different rules and economic conditions, but we should nevertheless draw on the experiences of others. In the US, Australia and Canada, for instance, the authorities have found that long introduction periods tend to be counter-productive. Instead of strengthening people’s resolve, long introductions become a form of quarantine, an existence separate from working life.

Discussion: The idea behind the model we apply in Sweden is that the refugees are given many months in which to build up their strength and resolve in order to surmount the numerous barriers that impede their entry into the labour market. Instead, we need to start at the other end and lower the barriers, so that the refugees can break their isolation from society before it is too late.

Proposal: One barrier that must be lowered is the language barrier. Countries with long experience of diversity have learnt that there are many jobs for which no great command of the language is required. In time, we too will have to get
used to the idea that small misunderstandings are not in fact a serious problem, whether we want to or not. The flow of people to and fro across national borders is going to increase, not diminish. All ways of speeding up the acclimatisation process in Sweden will be to the advantage of job-seeking newcomers to the country.

**Networks and voluntary organisations**

Better use must be made of local networks already in place. Where the resettled refugees live, there are clubs and associations, voluntary organisations, church communities, family businesses and immigrant organisations with both the will and the capacity to support the active efforts of new arrivals to find work and establish new contacts. In various connections, the Government has stressed the importance of engaging the country’s voluntary organisations in the work of resettling resettled refugees and asylum-seekers here. This is also emphasised by the UNHCR, the EU and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). In Sweden, however, formal responsibility has been explicitly invested in central, local and regional government, and bringing private players into the arena has proved difficult. There is every indication that voluntary forces and initiatives are going to be needed in the integration effort ahead.


In this connection, it should be emphasised that the refugees themselves must also be brought into the introduction work performed by both the local authorities and the local employment office as well as the work that in our view should be increasingly the remit of the voluntary organisations. Giving the refugees jobs or assignments in this field is something that is emphasised strongly in an international context. It is urged for instance in the ECRE’s *Good Practice Guide on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union, 1999*, as well as in the EU’s PHARE/Horizontal programme and in the work being done on behalf of the international resettled refugee conference for which the present report has been prepared.

“We must make better use of the local networks around us.”
**Proposal:** Experience from other countries shows that refugees have well-developed networks and that they are often the ones who are best placed to help newcomers find their footing in society. Greater effort must be made, therefore, to localise a network around each individual refugee/family. Municipal introduction plans are also considered very important by the refugees, according to an NKI study carried out by the National Integration Office. Individualised introduction plans for each refugee with networks, skills and possible ways of achieving the desired goals are an instrument that local authorities could develop further.

Many immigrants have been entrepreneurs and small businessmen. Removing obstacles to the establishment of new businesses, for example by making financing more accessible and simplifying rules, etc, is therefore a matter of urgency.

**Proposal:** The refugees’ efforts on their own behalf should be given greater support than at present. Well-established refugees who have been drafted into the reception work have proved good at helping newcomers start their own businesses. A possible avenue might be a mentor system where refugees with experience of starting their own companies can share what they have learnt with others. Trial efforts in this field should be encouraged.

Resetled refugees skilled in carpentry have successfully restored a traditional northern Swedish homestead in Luleå.
**Paths into working life**

Internationally, the importance of smoothing the path into the job market is often emphasised.

Compared with most countries in both East and West, Sweden has remarkably few unskilled jobs.

**Discussion:** One way of improving the chances of refugees and the unemployed finding work is to encourage the use of job training positions, apprenticing and mentor programmes. A brief period as a trainee can give people the opportunity both to practise the language and make useful contacts for the future.

If a more differentiated view were taken of refugees arriving here with widely disparate qualifications, the development of the Swedish labour market would be more dynamic and diversity would increase.

We must make better use of the well-educated and trained and also of those who lack educational qualifications but have solid working experience in their professions. One of the barriers confronting many refugees with vocational training is the prolonged evaluation process. By speeding this up, we can shorten their paths into the labour market.

A daily combination of theoretical studies and practical language training at a workplace pays considerable educational dividends. Newcomers learn the language faster when their days are varied in this fashion. Local authorities emphasise the importance of getting people into a job as soon as possible after arrival – and not just as a prop for language training.

Refugee introductions, say municipal staff working in this field, are a two-sided coin. On the one hand, refugees need to accustom themselves to Swedish conditions. On the other, people in the refugees’ vicinity need to familiarise themselves with a new group of inhabitants.

Gainful employment also offers other advantages – those who have held a job can become eligible for unemployment benefit and count on assistance from the employment office later on. A job, in other words, opens the door to the Swedish welfare system.
Ambitious work at municipal level

Those local authorities that have contributed to the present report are performing their task ambitiously and creatively.

Many refugee coordinating officers are having to struggle with small budgets, reluctant landlords and a stagnant job market. Nevertheless, they have had a number of successes in different fields.

The local authorities note that the resettled refugees who have come here in recent years have been more costly both financially and otherwise than previous groups. Due to the low level of education among them and the lengthy time they spent in camps, as well as other factors, more and more resources are required to ensure that they receive individualised introductions of the same high quality.

Discussion: The National Integration Office feels that the local authorities are doing excellent work and have come up with a striking range of solutions in relation to the resources at their disposal.

To support them in their work, changes are needed at system level that eliminate barriers and offer new solutions and methods, not least for the purpose of promoting a more dynamic labour market for newcomers to Sweden.
Appendix 1

Summary of the report by Kjerstin Almqvist

Extended psychosocial post-arrival interviews to facilitate the early introduction of supportive measures in resettled refugee families

A collaborative project involving the Värmland County Council Refugee Centre (FlyktingCenter), the Karlstad Municipal Refugee Reception Office and the Kil Municipal Refugee Reception Office.

Local authorities in Värmland have been taking in refugees since 1992. Most have been Kurds from the Al-Tash refugee camp in Iraq and Iranians from the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia.

To arrive at a closer understanding of these resettled refugees as a group and determine at an early stage which individuals and families were in need of special support, a project was launched in 1997 entitled ‘Extended psychosocial post-arrival interviews to facilitate the early introduction of supportive measures in resettled refugee families’.

All resettled refugees taken in by the local authorities of Karlstad and Kil in 1997 participated in the study. The adults comprised 16 mothers, 16 fathers and 15 young unmarried adults. Of the children, 32 were of school age and 28 of preschool age. On average, each family had 4.7 children – there were 38 boys and 22 girls in all.

The majority were Iranian Kurds. When war broke out between Iran and Iraq in 1980, they were obliged to flee from their small villages or be forcibly evacuated by the Iraqi army. After a year living in tents in camps in northern Iraq, the Iranian Kurds were interred in the big Al-Tash refugee camp, 100 km west of Baghdad. Forty-six of the children in the study were born there, as were three of the young adults.

Three of the families were Iraqis who had fled from Kuwait in connection with the Gulf War in 1991 and had then been transferred to the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia. Three of the children were born in that camp.

All of the Kurds spoke Sorani while 11 of the Iraqis had Arabic as their mother tongue.
The project disposition
All the families were visited in their homes by personnel from the County Council Refugee Centre together with the family's refugee officer and interpreter. Both parents were required to be at home for the visit and were to be asked whether or not they were willing to take part in the study. These home visits were much appreciated, and all agreed to take part. Plans for using certain standardised tests were quickly abandoned when it turned out that almost all the women and several of the men were illiterate. The fact that all concerned were unaccustomed to abstract presentations was also taken into account.

Surveying the families
The preliminary survey began with a ‘family interview’. All who were over 16 answered questions concerning family, background, time at the camp, life in Sweden, state of health and future aspirations.

Interviewing the parents
All the parents were interviewed separately about their school-age children, with about 30 minutes devoted to each child.

The parents of preschool children were interviewed at the child care clinic in cooperation with the clinic nurse. As a result of the nurses being brought into the project in this way, the network around each family was strengthened.

Children aged over 4 were submitted to a simple observation study and a children’s interview.

The questions concerning the children focused on their development, their background and their health.

Interviewing the schoolchildren
All the schoolchildren were interviewed individually on the school premises. Besides answering questions, they were given the opportunity to draw and to construct their families out of small wooden figures. The interviews centred on self-regard, background, life in Sweden, the family and health.

In addition, the children’s teachers were given the chance to fill in a questionnaire about each child.

Processing and action
The resultant data was collated and processed at various levels. The most pressing task was to quickly provide support for those found to be in need of special care.

The details drawn from the survey were also collated at group level to provide a picture of what characterised families from Al-
Tash and Rafha respectively as well as families who had come to Sweden via Turkey. This data was then used to inform refugee officers, teachers and childcare personnel about the situations and conditions that the families had been through.

The background data (such as traumatic exposure, separations and social networks) was statistically processed along with the current state of health of both children and adults.

### Previous situations

This is how the refugees describe their lives prior to arrival in Sweden.

#### Kurds from the Al-Tash camp in Iraq

This was the biggest group to arrive in Karlstad and Kil in 1997, numbering 83 persons in all. Most had spent 17 years in the camp, i.e. since the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq. Some of the men had turned up later. They had originally lived as Kurdish guerrillas, peshmerga, in northern Iraq. Most of the men had been either soldiers or peshmerga at some point in their lives. Almost all had grown up in the countryside, many of them from farming or cattle-raising families. Virtually all the women were illiterate. A couple of the oldest men in the group could neither read nor write. Few had a level of schooling on a par with a Swedish compulsory school leaving certificate.

Their accounts of life before war broke out were often vague. Those who were younger than 14 when they were forced to leave their homes claimed not to have any memories whatsoever of their childhood existence. Some of them described what were obviously post-traumatic memories and symptoms related to their having seen people being murdered or injured in connection with their flight from the village.

In Al-Tash, people had to build their own homes out of sun-dried mud. The summers were very warm, often over 40 degrees. Many had air conditioning, but this only worked for a few hours when the power supply was operating. Also, the equipment required water, which had to be carried from the river or lake.

The children described a free and exciting existence in relative security. They were allowed to play freely and had many friends. Those who were unable to sit still in class were told by the teacher to go home and grow up. As they lived in extended families, there was always at least one adult at home, and the parents did not feel tied down by parental responsibility. One father expressed it like this: bringing up two children in Sweden is like bringing up ten in Al-Tash.

But the children also described risks associated with their free
existence. Gang fights, bullying and beatings occurred among them. Several children told about accidents in which children had been injured or killed. The shortage of food and medicine afflicted the children in particular. After puberty, the girls were no longer allowed to roam freely. They describe how their lives changed and became much duller. Marrying early and having many children was commonplace.

Interpersonal relations were brutalised in many respects by life in Al-Tash. Social pressures grew and confrontations between families and gangs were said to be very frequent. Some families, for instance, took up the practice of female circumcision, although this custom is alien to the Kurds of today.

There were two schools in the camp, one open to all and one private school where you had to pay a fee. After the sixth grade, it was theoretically possible to continue studying in town, but none of the young people in the group had done so. Some had tried, but as all the teaching was in Arabic and moreover, as the young Kurds did not feel welcome there, they had soon quit. The parents described the children’s schooling as very flawed, which tallies with the comparisons drawn with Swedish children. Almost all the children of school age, however, can read and write.

The language spoken in Al-Tash was to the mother tongue Sorani roughly as ‘Rinkeby Swedish’ – a form of big-city creole spoken by young Stockholm immigrants – is to Swedish. It is a conceptually deficient dialect, which makes learning Swedish more difficult.

All the adults described life in the camp as the worst experience they had ever had. Lack of food, water, hygiene, medical care, good schooling, employment or the means of subsistence, lack of faith in the future, etc.

The women often stressed the laboriousness of carrying home water. Several women felt the worst part of camp life was being unable to get medicines and help for their sick children. The men described hunger and the inability to find enough food for the children as the worst aspect. They were allowed out of the camp to try and earn money. The meagre rations provided to each family were inadequate. Inflation in the 1990s eroded their allowance of 120 dinars/family to such an extent that “it was only enough for a kilo of tomatoes instead of a month’s food for the family”. But earning money was hard, which greatly worried the menfolk. The most favourably disposed to life at Al-Tash were the children, who had nothing else to compare with.

Thirteen of the Kurds in the group had lived in northern Iraq and had come to Sweden via transit camps in Turkey. They had been
forced to leave their villages in the border zone between Iran and Iraq when war broke out in 1981. After fleeing, they had nevertheless been able to lead lives fairly similar to their previous ones. They had been able to support themselves, to live in the 'Kurdistan' region and to retain their customs and family norms. Their lives had however been full of adversity, primarily due to the Kurds’ situation and to political persecution. The men were active peshmerga. This group, too, found it increasingly difficult to earn their upkeep because of the inflation that resulted from the UN sanctions against Iraq.

**Iraqis from the Rafah camp in Saudi Arabia**

Eleven of the resettled refugees were Arabic-speaking Iraqis, originally from southern Iraq. They had been in a better position before the war, with big farms and fruit and vegetable plantations. Their financial status was sound and both girls and boys attended school.

This group had been exposed to some very harrowing experiences, both by war and persecution and in the Rafha camp. As they had been politically active, they had been persecuted for years. Several of the men had undergone torture. Their homes had been laid waste and the families had been obliged to live in exile within the country. When the Gulf War ended in 1991, they joined the Iraqis who fled to Kuwait.

After a period at the transit camp in Kuwait, living under harsh conditions, they were given help by the allied forces and placed in the Rafha camp, situated in the desert outside the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh. This group, then, had been exposed to considerably more traumatic stress from organised violence than had the Kurdish resettled refugees.

The Rafha camp was in some respects worse than Al-Tash – situated in the Saudi desert, completely isolated from the outside world, guarded and controlled by the Saudi army. No-one could get in or out without a pass. At full capacity, it housed 33,000 registered refugees.

During the early years, the camp was shaken by widespread disturbances. The rioting was quelled by military police, however, and things calmed down. But the lack of anything to do generated gloom and frustration.

People lived in simple tents or makeshift shacks. The women had to be veiled if they showed themselves outside their tents. The children had to be kept in. Medical care was poor but there was no lack of food or water.
■ Result of the survey

The refugees’ social networks are central to their lives in Sweden - the company of their family, relations and other Kurds has been the basis of their social lives. All the interviewees described the close proximity of their relations as the most important feature of their lives in exile. The menfolk in several of the Al-Tash families had fought together as peshmerga and belonged to the same political party. For some, these ties were as important as family ties.

As Karlstad had been receiving resettled refugees for several years, priority was given to the intake of family members when new groups were accepted. As a result, the Kurds from Al-Tash had a fairly large network of friends and relations around them when they arrived. The children had little difficulty finding friends, according to the parents. When the children themselves were interviewed, they described a more problematic situation. Some 25 per cent said they had been bullied by other Kurdish children.

The Iraqis from the Rafha camp did not have the same kind of social network. And these refugees described loneliness and a sense of alienation as major problems.

All the adults missed a close relative of one kind or another. Seventy per cent had at least one immediate member of the family still in Al-Tash or Rafha. This was a great burden to them, a source of considerable pain and worry, and the refugees were under pressure from those still in the camp to help get them out. Mothers with adult children still there were more or less consumed by anxiety. Leaving their own parents behind had also created problems. Several of the mothers were not used to looking after their children on their own. Their mothers or mothers-in-law had had a large share of the responsibility for raising the children. Several children were not getting the care they needed because their mothers spent their days crying and worrying. The oldest daughters in the family - even if they were still quite young - were obliged to assume much of the responsibility for running the home.

Separation from other members of the family was the single main cause of mental ill-health among the adults.

The children, too, suffered at being separated from close relatives. Thirteen per cent had left someone behind in the camp whom the parents described as the child’s psychological parent, often a grandmother.

■ Background and education

Most of the adults had grown up in the countryside or in small villages. Just over half spoke positively about growing up in this environment, while the rest felt that problems caused by oppres-
sion, lack of freedom and poverty had dominated. Many of the men had been inspired by the Muslim revolution and had joined revolutionary groups where they were introduced to a different way of thinking. This informed their accounts of their youth, whereas the womenfolk spoke principally about life on the farm and in the village community.

The level of education was low. All the Kurdish women over 25 and the oldest Kurdish men were illiterate. This made it very difficult for them to adapt to Swedish conditions in the educational sphere. Teachers in SFI (Swedish For Immigrants) programmes are not used to dealing with illiterates, and many of the students complained that they found it hard to keep up. Many had difficulty concentrating and also recalling what had been discussed during the lesson. The children came to take over more and more of the family’s dealings with the community, which led to problems related to the undermining of parental authority.

When the schoolchildren discussed the difference between the schools in the camp and Swedish education, they always spoke more favourably of their present school.

**Work and occupation**

Many in the group had earned their living through sheep-rearing and simple farming. A few had held jobs requiring vocational skills, such as welders, electricians and teachers. The women had looked after the children and occupied themselves with simple handicrafts.

In the Rafha camp, the refugees were given food and other essentials, but in Al-Tash the men had to try and find extra income to ensure their families’ survival. Those with professional training were able to find work in town, others earned money by things like fishing or trading on a small scale. The family’s subsistence problems meant that the boys also had to try and help out, working as shoe-cleaners and hairdressers, etc.

As they grew up, the girls assumed increasing responsibility for their younger brothers and sisters and for the home. This helped ease the burden on the womenfolk.

**Exposed to violence and danger**

The degree to which people were exposed to violence or danger was clearly related to their gender, age and country of origin. The men had suffered most, having taken part in fighting or been subjected to political persecution. Twenty years after witnessing the horror, some of the Kurds who had fled their home villages on the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in 1980 still had painful recollections and nightmares about mutilated and dead people they had known, both family members and neighbours. Some of
the younger men who had been peshmerga in recent years had evident post-traumatic symptoms.

Such symptoms were more explicit and intensive among the Iraqis than among the Kurds. Several of them had been subjected to political persecution, imprisonment and torture. Women and children, too, had been exposed to considerable hardships, had lived underground and had suffered armed attack. Time is also a factor – the Iraqis fled ten years later than the Kurds, which means events are fresher in their minds.

The children had largely been spared serious exposure to violence or danger, according to the parents. Ninety per cent of them had been born in the camp and had not had to live through the violence that forced their parents to flee. All told, 10 of the 60 children were said by the parents to have been exposed to some form of organised violence or some form of danger, although not of a serious nature. Instead, the parents were worried that the children had been adversely affected by the poor conditions they lived in at the camp.

Both children and parents described how gangs had developed in Al-Tash that engaged in violence and criminality, which resulted in many children witnessing frightening incidents. Knife fights, for instance, were commonplace. The children themselves made clear that they had been upset by such occurrences.

Health and ill-health

A comparatively large number of the adults described illnesses which had had a detrimental effect on their quality of life. These often concerned aches and pains that were difficult to treat. Many were dissatisfied at the medical centre’s failure to find anything wrong and to give them help.

The young adults described themselves as healthy, but also reported a number of symptoms of ill-health.

Among both the younger parents and the young single adults, several had painful memories and nightmares as a result of wartime experiences or atrocities.

There was a clear link between organised violence and the number of symptoms of ill-health among the menfolk.

Despite all the symptoms, 68 per cent of the adults described themselves as being in good health at the time of the interviews, and 21 per cent said they felt both in good shape and bad shape. In comparing the respective health of married couples, a kind of see-saw effect emerged. A man who had been seriously exposed to violence and danger and who displayed a range of symptoms tended to have a wife with no signs of ill-health whatsoever.
Women who displayed many symptoms and described themselves as ill tended to have husbands without any symptoms of their own. At the same, there was a pronounced correlation between the subjective health of husband and wife. This may possibly be the result of dynamic compensatory interaction between the two – one shoulders greater responsibility and is less concerned with his or her own problems if the other is badly in need of succour.

A number of parents described how their children had recovered their health in Sweden after suffering from disorders like asthma, allergies and bronchial infections in the Al-Tash camp. Many who had children with disabilities were very anxious about them. They found it hard to accept that the children could not be cured, although they were pleased about cases where improvements had been made.

Eighty per cent of the preschool children and 88 per cent of the schoolchildren were said by the parents to have been healthy and to have developed well since birth. There is however reason to doubt the parents' accounts of their children's early development. With remarkable frequency, all the children in the family were described in the same way. The parents had probably failed to notice small differences between their children, except where disabilities were involved.

Several women described problematic births in the camps. Some had given birth in Sweden. They described these deliveries as “much worse” than the ones in the camps. The men, on the other hand, were impressed by all the mechanical equipment and happy to have been able to attend the birth of one of their children for the first time.

Almost all the children were described by the parents as healthy and virtually free of symptoms. Descriptions of them as sad or irritable were more frequent. Some parents said they were worried about their children. This had nothing to do with symptoms or illness in the child. There was however a connection between symptoms or illness in the father or mother and the parents' tendency to express concern about the child.

The schoolchildren describe their own health/ill-health

Most of the schoolchildren reported a number of different symptoms that were upsetting or troubling them. Many said they preferred to be with their parents when they were not in school, while a comparatively large number said they withdrew from their friends and isolated themselves. Nevertheless, they were open and trusting in their interviews. The boys were most interested in playing football in their spare time, and the teachers took the view that the children had plenty of friends. One explanation of this
discrepancy is that the children gave the kind of answer that they felt well-mannered children should give – well-mannered children should preferably stay at home when not at school.

Their accounts of their melancholy and irritability, however, were indisputable. Many of the children, especially the boys, said they often cried when they thought about members of their family still in the camp. Often, too, the children were very sad because their parents were sad and worried about family members. Some of the children described feelings of unhappiness with their lot and a yearning for the camp.

Several children described persistent recollections of frightening experiences in the refugee camp. These events were not mentioned by the parents in relation to the children.

Most of the children described how they preferred watching cartoons and other “non-frightening” TV programmes. A few preferred “scary and exciting” programmes. The TV was always on during our visits, usually tuned to the Kurdish channel, which has news programmes but also highly dramatic narratives and films with a very violent content. About a third of the children reported sleep derangement and two-thirds of them described hyper-vigilance, i.e., always being on one’s guard and becoming easily agitated.

Eight of the 32 schoolchildren said they were bullied.

There were considerable differences between how the parents described the schoolchildren’s health and the children’s own descriptions. Children said by their parents to be healthy and well-functioning described a large number of symptoms themselves. Children who the parents felt were not in good shape described no symptoms whatsoever when interviewed themselves. Similar results have been noted in other comparisons between children’s and parents’ responses concerning children’s post-traumatic syndromes. In the author’s view, further studies are needed in this area to further our understanding.

There was a surprisingly clear negative correlation between the father’s state of health and the extent to which the children reported various symptoms. Children with fathers who were in good health tended to describe more symptoms of their own than children whose fathers were in poor shape. Fathers who described many symptoms tended to have children who displayed no symptoms whatsoever.

**Action**

Apart from direct measures and assistance given to those among the refugees who proved to be in need of it, the study led to various forms of action. Six different undertakings were launched as part of an overall action programme.
Discussion groups for young women about life in Sweden. Seven young women who had grown up in Al-Tash met on 10 occasions. The aim was to provide them with a meeting-place at which they could discuss and receive information about life as a woman in Sweden, with respect shown for their Kurdish identity.

Discussion groups for young men about life in Sweden. All the single young men aged 17-33 were invited to join a discussion group entitled ‘Living in Sweden’. The discussions focused on Swedish culture as expressed in the relationship between men and women and in the community as a whole.

Introductory group for young mothers. A couple of young mothers gave birth shortly after arriving in Sweden. They were left isolated in their homes, learnt no Swedish and had no social intercourse with one another. The aim of the group was to give the various mothers a chance to get to know one another and to begin taking part in various activities with a view to ending their isolation. This worked out well.

Language mentor project for children of school age. The Al-Tash children lacked the backing they needed at home due to the parents having had so little schooling. Their level of knowledge, too, was low compared to that of Swedish schoolchildren. Language mentors were recruited from among trainee teachers and youth recreation leaders. Mentors and children were to meet a couple of times a week for talks and to go over homework. The mentors took part in supervisory group meetings. The project was much appreciated by most of the children. The difficulty has lain in recruiting mentors – a number of them have left due to lack of time.

Study circle on Swedish society for men. During the survey, a number of men said they wanted better information about Sweden and Swedish society. A committed teacher from Folkuniversitetet (the ‘People’s University’) led the studies, with the help of an interpreter.

Study circle on everyday life in Sweden focusing on health and hygiene. Women with children took part in the sessions, which had a number of different themes. Activities included visiting a laundry-room on the housing estate, going through how you book a time, how you work the machines, how underwear is used in Sweden, what they look like, etc. The circle attracted many women and was much appreciated.

The action programme shows that this group of refugees is in need of long-term integration-inducing measures, the author states. Short-term projects are not enough. Resettled refugees coming to Sweden after lengthy stays in camps will continue to need support for several years after their arrival. This is a necessary step if integration is to be a realistic goal for such groups.
Appendix 2

Medical Clinic for Refugees
- helping the traumatised

‘See the individual’ is a concept that be expressed in many different ways. ‘Let her become Swedish in her own way’, for instance. Or ‘each of us has our own schedule’.

“It’s just a matter of developing a keen eye and ear, that’s all,” says Curt Blomquist, head of the Medical Care for Refugees clinic in Linköping.

The ability to be sensitive to refugees’ needs, he adds, is a skill that should be built into refugee reception to a far greater extent than at present. Introduction programmes for each individual refugee are a step in the right direction, but they are by no means enough – the entire system is far too rigid.

“The aim must be to give people the tools and means to build the best possible lives for themselves by their own efforts, not to squeeze them into our moulds. Why is it so impossible to study Swedish for one a hour a day, for instance? Why must everyone study for half a day or a full day, even if they haven’t the will or energy? Sometimes we’re too quick to try and get people to function properly under the conditions that we have drawn up for them. This creates undue expectations that few can live up to.”

Medical Care for Refugees (FMC) is a specialist unit at Linköping University Hospital. The clinic is a competence centre and one of the country’s surgeries for treating refugees who have been tortured or traumatised in war. The refugees who come here are those in need of therapy or of other kinds of assistance that the municipal refugee service is unable to give them – and that the regular health service currently lacks the skills and resources to provide them with.

This, says Curt Blomquist, is not the way it should be.

“The basic principle in this country is that all individuals are to be provided with care on equal terms. We shouldn’t have a special unit for immigrants. Depending on how you count, between 10 and 20 per cent of the present population have foreign roots. It’s reasonable to assume that they, too, should be looked after by the primary care and regular psychiatric care services. Our task, as we see it, is to develop and disseminate skills so that this kind of division will no longer be needed in future.”
Curt Blomquist believes that substantially more refugees than we imagine are going around in extremely poor shape without anyone noticing it. People who have been severely traumatised by their war experiences are encapsulating their mental pain and suffering bodily pain instead.

“It’s easier to put a stomach ache into words, or a back ache or a pain in your arm. Also, many of these people come from countries where psychiatry is regarded as something for patients with grave mental disorders. To some extent, this outlook is still to be found among us Swedes as well. People’s aches and pains go on for years and no-one understands why.”

He does not feel it is always correct to label refugees in a poor state of mind as ill.

“Responding to very distressing experiences by displaying symptoms can be a healthy reaction,” he says.

**Preoccupied with memories**

The more harrowing events the person experiences, the greater the risk that he or she will develop what is termed a post-traumatic stress syndrome. This manifests itself in various ways, but in many cases people who are traumatised become preoccupied with their memories. These may intrude upon their consciousness at any time of the night or day – at night, usually in the form of nightmares and heavily-disrupted sleep. Having to concentrate on things like studies the following day may then prove impossible. Another common symptom is the avoidance of anything that might awaken memories of the past. The person withdraws, isolates himself or herself and avoids social intercourse. In such circumstances, having to attend lessons together with others becomes a traumatic event in itself. If little progress is made in school, this simply adds to the burden.

A stress syndrome may also manifest itself in the form of deep anxiety, worry and irritability that sometimes escalates into aggression. Depression is another common reaction.

“People displaying these symptoms must be given professional help,” says Curt Blomquist. “District medical officers can provide such help, or, if they can’t, specialists.”

He describes how the FMC is currently in the process of preparing a project together with the local authority in Dorotea in the north, which has taken in 50 resettled refugees from Sierra Leone. The DMO in Dorotea found that further resources were needed and contacted the clinic via the National Integration Office.

“We’ll be providing peripatetic support, including courses for staff and consultations and supervision via TV screens.”

This is a new work approach for the FMC and may, it is thought,
be a model for the future, enabling support to be provided to small local authorities lacking resources close at hand.

**Refugees’ earlier lives must be taken into account**

When you view each individual separately, says Blomquist, it becomes clear that some refugees have such difficult backgrounds and are in such a poor state that they will never be able to take a job. Drawing up the same goals for all refugees is unrealistic.

“But if we were to bypass formula procedure we might be able to snap up more people than we are doing at present, find other openings. We must learn to see each person individually. We must also work backwards into the past, not just think about the here and now. Who do I have in front of me? What has this person gone through before coming here? What are his or her strengths and inner resources, what can we build on?”

Catrin Lidberg, a psychologist with the FMC, treats refugees at the clinic. Working there is different from working in regular psychiatric care, she says. Much time has to be devoted to practical problems, to sorting out misunderstandings and to contacting the social services, the local employability institute, the employment office and other authorities.

“They may often be minor matters, but they have to be dealt with. I’ve noticed that there are a lot of misunderstandings surrounding our patients. Far too little interpreting is provided. If interpreters were used more often, a lot of problems could be avoided.”

A refugee traumatised by war or camp life is twice as disconcerted by unsolved practical problems here in Sweden, says Catrin Lidberg. Such problems may prevent the trauma from becoming accessible for treatment.

**Focus on health**

At the FMC, people refer to the salutogenic perspective – seeing the causes of health rather than of ill-health, possibilities rather than obstacles.

“They who survive war and flight and many years in a refugee camp possess considerable reserves of strength.”

Experience has also shown that those who spent time in refugee camps due to a conscious political commitment are in better shape than those who were driven from their homes without cause and found themselves in an intolerable situation. Comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness are important to a person’s mental health. In the case of newly-arrived refugees in Sweden, this means that they must be given the chance to adjust to their new lives at their own pace. Not until then will life seem comprehensible.
Appendix 3

Municipal settlement of refugees

Procedures applied by The National Integration Office

Since 1989, the great majority of resettled refugees have been provided with immediate municipal settlement.

In the case of very rapid transfers, within a couple of days of the initial presentation of a case, a stay of a day or two at one of the Migration Board’s reception centres may be required before the refugee can be taken in by the local authority. So far, however, such a measure has seldom been necessary.

Settlement dossiers

The Migration Board compiles what are known as settlement dossiers and sends them to the municipal settlement case officers at the National Integration Office. These dossiers contain information about the composition of the family, age, language(s) spoken, education, work experience, relatives in Sweden, state of health and so on. This information is subsequently used as a basis for the Office’s contacts with local authorities prepared to take in the refugees.

Municipal reception

The National Integration Office has agreements with 140 of Sweden’s local authorities regarding the intake of refugees from reception centres, people admitted on the grounds of family ties, those who arrange their own contracts and resettled refugees, etc. The officers responsible primarily contact these local authorities when new resettled refugees are to be settled. Exceptions are made where the person concerned has relatives in an area lacking a municipal settlement agreement. In such cases, the local authority concerned is asked first if it is prepared to take in the refugee.

If a local authority incurs extra costs as a result of resettled refugees being directly settled in its area, it can apply to the National Integration Office for ‘compensation for extraordinary costs’.

Distribution around Sweden

The settlement dossier and the information it contains serve as a basis for the further processing of a case. If there are relatives in Sweden, we contact the local authority concerned. If there are relatives in a number of local authority areas, we consult with them all.

Further factors that may restrict the range of suitable recipient
areas include the need for special housing for disabled persons, the need for specialist medical care or if the person in question speaks a particularly unusual language.

Persons without relatives in Sweden and without any special needs are taken in by a local authority possessing the necessary resources as regards available accommodation of a suitable type, introduction plans adapted to each person’s educational background (university-trained/lacks schooling), and sometimes also the person’s future prospects for earning a living in the area.

### Settlement processing

When a settlement dossier reaches the Municipal Settlement Department, a suitable local authority is contacted and advised about the persons in line for municipal reception and introduction. If the local authority is able to take them in, the National Integration Office sends it a set of particulars – an augmented settlement dossier – as formal confirmation of the decision. These particulars are also sent to the Migration Board, whereupon its Quota & Administration Department takes the necessary steps to effect the transfer.

The augmented dossier provides the Migration Board with information about the recipient local authority and, in cases where the local authority cannot settle the refugees immediately, about the earliest possible reception date. Other contacts prior to intake are the responsibility of the Migration Board and the local authorities.

### Difficulties/Obstacles

Difficulties in finding good placements, i.e., suitable openings on introduction programmes, often crop up at the end of the year, when many local authorities have already met their agreed quota. This is particularly noticeable in local authority areas around Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, but also in other large and medium-sized areas.

Those with relatives in one of these areas risk being settled further and further away from them the closer we get to the end of the year.

The more evenly we are able to spread resettled refugees around the country during the year, the easier it is to find good quality placements.

Settlement processing is easier in years when comparatively few people are granted permits at reception centres and the local authorities have excess capacity.

When there is insufficient capacity, each settlement case may take a considerable time as the local authorities must always give their approval prior to intake.
Lack of information
At intake, it sometimes transpires that the persons concerned have special needs that the local authority was not informed about in advance. In one case, a family had several autistic children as well as additional needs, something that had not emerged earlier.

Settlement case officers can only pass on the information that is contained in the settlement dossiers. Quite a few of them lack information about the refugees’ state of health, which is a major weakness. Municipal willingness to accept resettled refugees has declined from time to time as a result of local authorities having to take in people for whom they are unable to provide adequate introduction programmes and for whom extra resources are required in terms of both staff and financial input.

Costly reception
Over the last couple of years, discussions about municipal settlement have tended to centre on the degree to which local authorities could cover their costs and obtain compensation for taking in resource-consuming persons, especially those with mental and physical disabilities. This applies not only to resettled refugees but also to people accepted from reception centres.

Emergency transfers
Where emergency quota transfers are involved, there is not always enough time to find the most suitable area for an introduction. It is then a case of finding a local authority able and willing to receive the person in question at short notice. This means it must be able to find accommodation rapidly and have staff available who are able to deal with the case.

Government-defined objective
The objective as defined in the Appropriations Directive is to settle resettled refugees directly in a local authority area. To date, we have managed to fulfil this objective. The Government also requires those granted municipal settlement from a reception centre to be given a place in a local authority area no later than three weeks from the date that their case reached the National Integration Office.

Resettled refugees have traditionally been given priority in municipal settlement in Sweden, as it has been felt that those living in refugee camps or the like outside the country’s borders are in a more insecure position than those staying at one or other of the Migration Board’s reception centres.

If most quota transfers take place at the end of the year, a careful line has to be trodden between seeking to achieve the goals set for the settlement programme and finding suitable municipal places for all concerned.
Information on Resettlement and Guidelines for the Planning and Execution of Quota Refugee Assignments

Where applicable, these guidelines also apply to staff sent into the field by the Migration Board to present Sweden Programmes or perform international tasks of a similar nature.

General

The Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) provides an annual appropriation for the resettlement of refugees in Sweden as part of the refugee quota programme. The Government assigns the Migration Board to effectuate the selection and transfer of resettled refugees. Responsibility for this lies with the Board’s Quota & Administration Department, Central Region, Norrköping. Responsibility for the reception and municipal placement of resettled refugees lies with the National Integration Office’s New Immigrants Department. There is an ongoing exchange of information between the two agencies.

The quotas are selected either via dossier submissions or through selection missions.

Dossier submissions involve either the UNHCR, a Swedish embassy/consulate or some other organisation trusted by the Board submitting candidates via case studies presented to the Migration Board as a basis for decision.

Selection missions involve teams being dispatched abroad by the Migration Board to select refugees on-site, usually in refugee camps, in consultation with the UNHCR.

The refugees are interviewed and given some basic information about Sweden, after which the team normally takes permit decisions on the spot. Some cases, e.g., ones involving disabled persons, may sometimes be referred back to Sweden for further consideration and a final decision.

The general principle governing the reception of resettled
refugees is that they are to be settled directly in a Swedish local authority area without an interim stay at a reception centre. Brief transit stays pending municipal settlement may occur in rare instances.

**Assignment and decisions**

The Director-General is responsible for decisions on selection missions. Records of decisions are drafted by the Central Region in consultation with the Standard Practices Department at Head Office. The actual assignment is defined in a contract between the Head of Mission and the Head of Central Region. The protocol and the contract together make up the mission’s mandate and contain things like the criteria for selection, the duration of the assignment, financing, the name of the Head of Mission and the team members, etc.

The mission work is planned and coordinated by Quota & Admin in consultation with the Visa Department.

**Mission competence, composition, etc**

The composition of the mission team is to be such that the selection, transfer and direct municipal settlement of the refugees may be achieved in a competent and correct manner.

**Heads of Mission**

The task of leading a mission is a demanding one requiring a well-developed sense of responsibility. The person undertaking the task, and his or her superior, must be clear about the nature and extent of the work, not only as regards the selection process itself but also with regard to preparatory work and whatever post-operation work may be required. The preparatory work, involving embassy and UNHCR contacts, meetings with mission team members, the scrutiny of UNHCR case studies and the planning of interview schedules, etc, is particularly time-consuming. The preparations, in which Quota & Admin staff join, also include assembling mission materials with the relevant factual information and state of the country studies, clarifying the security situation and drawing up contingency plans for evacuation (check list), drawing up a list of relatives and absorbing what has been learnt from previous selection missions, etc.

The Head of Mission is responsible for ensuring that the assignment is carried out in the manner prescribed. He or she is to lead the work of the group and ensure that all the members receive the help and support they need throughout the assignment period. The task of leading the actual selection work with interviews, lectures and draft decisions may where necessary be delegated to a team member invested with special authority for the purpose. This type of situation may arise if the mission team is working in
different areas, if the Head of Mission is indisposed or if he or she is obliged to perform duties outside the regular mission framework.

The Head of Mission is to have a sound working knowledge of the entire resettlement process, including permit processing, transfer routines and municipal reception.

The Head of Mission is to contact the Swedish Security Service (Säpo) in Stockholm and the Migration Board Security Service in good time prior to departure in order to acquire a general picture of the security situation in the country/region concerned. The security policy situation is assessed in closer detail in consultation with the Swedish diplomatic mission(s) concerned and with the UNHCR security division. Where applicable, time should be specially reserved for an assessment of the current security situation for the whole or parts of the mission team. A measure of security equipment is taken along on the recommendation of the Board’s Security Service.

Evacuation plans are to be drawn up in consultation with the Swedish embassy or consulate concerned.

The Head of Mission is to represent both the Migration Board and the mission team in external contacts and perform this task in a manner that inspires confidence and respect. Should there be a change in the preconditions for completion of the assignment, the Head of Mission is to obtain a mandate or information via Quota & Admin where necessary.

The Head of Mission is responsible for ensuring that the assignment is discharged in a cost-effective manner.

Prior to its return home, the group is to hand over its list of case decisions to the embassy/consulate, the UNHCR and the IOM. Work materials including interviews and decisions are to be presented as soon as possible after arrival to Quota & Admin along with any information about pending cases, etc (see below). Quota & Admin register the cases and decisions and prepare the transfer and municipal reception processes by completing settlement dossiers for the benefit of the National Integration Office.

The assignment is concluded at the debriefing when the Head of Mission presents his report and gives an account of the mission to the Regional Director of Central Region and to the staff concerned. See below under Miscellaneous.

Team members

Participation in a selection mission is voluntary. A place on a mission team is to be regarded as a mark of personal trust and as an investment both in the individual concerned and in his or her work department.
The number of participants on a mission depends on the nature and scale of the assignment. Gender equality in the group and the broadest possible range of resettlement skills are to be aimed at.

All team members are to take part in the assignment work in accordance with the Head of Mission’s instructions. Their duties include interviewing refugees and taking part in the selection process, although the actual decisions are taken by the Head of Mission. Everyone involved in the mission is required to be familiar with the main points of Swedish refugee and immigration policy.

All team members are to have a good command of English as well as experience in the use of personal computers. At least one member of the group should be skilled in computer technology. The participants are also required to be cooperative and flexible in character and able to cope with stress.

The need for culturally competent and linguistically skilled team members is determined from assignment to assignment, but at least one member should have this kind of specialist competence. Criteria such as ‘long and faithful service’, ‘next in turn’, ‘needs encouragement’, etc, do not qualify a person for selection missions.

Recruitment

Heads of Mission are recruited from among officers at the Migration Board whose competence is well-documented and who are deemed to possess the necessary qualities and know-how for assignments of this kind.

Members of staff wishing to be part of a mission can report this to their immediate superior, who assesses their suitability and the practicality of their involvement on the basis of the current work situation. Their names, a brief account of their present duties and other relevant details are then sent on to Quota & Admin, with appropriate recommendations from the Head of Region. The final selection is made jointly by Quota & Admin and the Head of Mission in close consultation. The Head of Quota & Admin decides the final composition of the team.

External members of the team, where such are needed, are chosen in consultation with the Head of Mission. See below under ‘Other participants’.

Backup

Quota & Admin staff are on 24-hour telephone standby throughout the time the selection mission is under way abroad. For assignments in areas with primitive means of communication, special equipment is brought along to ensure that contact is maintained with Quota & Admin. See below under ‘Equipment’.
**Miscellaneous**

- **Pending cases**
  
  Cases which for one reason or another cannot be decided during the selection process may be brought home for a decision. These may be cases requiring a pronouncement from the Swedish Security Service or ones requiring special study before a final decision is made.

  Cases that are often difficult to resolve without a medical opinion are those involving disabled persons. If there is insufficient time to obtain a doctor's referral or opinion from Sweden while the mission is under way, the case is decided after the team returns home. Journals and other medical documentation are added to the dossier for adjudication after the return.

  It is the duty of the Head of Mission to ensure that pending cases are resolved and that Quota & Admin, the embassy, the UNHCR and the IOM are informed of the decisions.

- **Safety aspects, screening, etc**

  Refugees presented for selection as well as their relatives in Sweden are to be given security screenings as a matter of course in conjunction with selection decisions (applies to both dossier submissions and selection missions). If the resultant opinion is negative, an overall assessment of the case is to be carried out on the spot, or the case is to be given further consideration and decided on the mission's return home. The Swedish Security Service is generally represented on selection missions. Its representative is one of the team and takes part in the work on the same terms as other members. Cooperation between the Migration Board and the Swedish Security Service is of considerable mutual benefit as certain security aspects need to be taken into consideration when individual cases are assessed. Also, Swedish Security Service representatives often have long experience of investigatory work and this is an asset as regards both interview methods and the ability to listen/observe in a receptive way. Keen perception and sensitivity can thus help prevent ‘wrong individuals’ being granted permits as part of the refugee quota.

  During the mission preparations, officers of the Migration Board should be given some elementary insight into security thinking at various levels and of various kinds, for instance in relation to organised crime, intelligence activities, mine hazards, etc.

- **Other participants**

  Sometimes, outside parties express an interest in joining the mission for a shorter or longer period of time. These may be Members of Parliament, ministry officials, members of the Migration Board executive, media representatives, etc. The Regional
Director of Central Region is responsible for decisions on external participation or the presence of observers. As mentioned above under ‘Financing’, each principal is responsible for whatever costs may arise in connection with such participation. The only exception concerns external members invited to join a Sweden Programme, for instance. Their peripheral costs are defrayed by the Migration Board while their employers are expected to pay their salaries.

Return home/Mission report

Debriefing always takes place in conjunction with the mission’s return home. If possible, all members of the group are to be present. Special discussion leaders are to take part if the group considers this appropriate. The purpose of the debriefing is to give the mission the chance to work through its experiences, to compare observations and to analyse and list possible improvements for the future. The Regional Director of Central Region takes part in the final debriefing session together with representatives of Quota & Admin.

The Head of Mission is responsible for ensuring that the assignment is properly documented no later than two months after the group’s return. The report is to include details such as the composition of the mission team, its mandate, selection criteria, preparations, cooperation with the relevant authorities and organisations, and a description of the practical selection work and the outcome of the selection process. This documentation should also contain any other information and proposals that might have a bearing on future missions.

Information of importance for the Swedish local authorities receiving the refugees should also be documented. Such information should be compiled separately and refer to the general social situation in the country/camp/equivalent, previous employment, state of health, education, exposure to the Sweden Programme, etc.

The documentation is subsequently distributed by Quota & Admin to interested parties inside and outside the Board, as follows:

- The Director General
- The Heads of Department concerned
- The Information Department/Press Service
- The Library
- The Standard Practices Department
- The Quota Coordinating Officer for the Permit Departments in Norrköping
- The Quota & Administration Department
- The Head of Mission
- The members of the mission team
- The National Integration Office
- The Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- The Ministry of the Interior
- The UNHCR in Stockholm
- The UNHCR in Geneva
- The Swedish Embassy concerned
- Recipient local authorities
- Quota Officers in other Nordic countries
Appendix 5
Information on resettled refugees. Sample documents.

The Migration Board's personal information concerning resettled refugees is entered on a standard form the size of an A4 page. The particulars in the above form have been made anonymous.
Har alltid gått i skola i hemlandet och kan säkert ej läsa och skriva. Har arbetat som hemvän och har ingen kunskap om arbete och utbildning. Vill lära sig svenska för att kunna skåda sig i jobb i samhället. Har brevpå med nyfö och ben och har svört att arbeta med ett tunge arbete.

1. Svenska till SFI-nivå
2. Vågådsjobb i det svenska arbetslivet
3. Arbeta

Studierar fortsätande på KursVux för SFI-talb.

Har ej gått i skola i hemlandet utan arbetat i familjens jordbruksodlat grundnäring och teknik. SFI kläder man.

Vill lära sig svenska språket men vet ej vad hon fortsättningsvis vill göra i det nya landet. Karlek något kvinnligt arbeta?? Sager hon.

1. SFI-nivå
2. Vågådsjobb
3. Evant
4. Arbeta

Above: Complete introduction plans for two persons in Municipality A.

A complete introduction plan for one person in Municipality B.
Complete introduction plans for one person in Municipality C, page 1.
Complete introduction plans for one person in Municipality C, page 2.
Introduktionsplan för...

Bakgrund:

... är kvotflykting från Irak som kom till Sverige och
... 1970... var ensamstående då han kom till
Sverige. Han kom närmast från Rafael-lägret i Saudi-arabien där han
bott under de sex åren.

Utbildning/arbetshyserfarenhet:

... har gått 9 år i grundskolan. Han har sedan gått en
verknadsmechanist utbildning i 2 år, ... har hjälpt sin far på
denna arbetsdödsfall under sin skolåld. Han har sedan gjort militärdienst
under åren 19...-19...

Social situation:

... är nu gift och bor med sin fru i ... De väntar sitt
första barn. ... har varit sjukskriven en längre tid p.g.a. PTSD.

Aktuell situation/placering för framtiden:

... deltog i början av sin kommunplacering i SFI. Han gjorde
e ett uppehälle i studierna efter en år, då han blev sjukskriven av
läkare från vårdpsyk. Han har under de senaste åren deltagit i en
individuell rehab-åtgärd med undervisning varvad med praktik.
... är sedan en mängd tillståt haft sjukskriven och har
praktik i ... systerhems samt SFI under eftermiddagar i veckan.
Nya planering kommer att ske till hösten för vidare rehabiliterande
åtgärder.
Complete introduction plans for one person in Municipality D, page 2.
 Bounds of Security
The Reception of Resettled Refugees in Sweden

Sweden works closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in offering people in need of sanctuary a new home. Every year, Sweden takes in between 500 and 1500 persons as part of what is termed the refugee quota. Since 1996, the majority of resettled refugees have come from camps in Iraq and Saudi Arabia after living there for many years. Swedish local authorities are looking for new ways of dealing with the special needs these people have. This report focuses on the experiences and reflections of those working with refugee reception in ten different parts of Sweden.