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Newcomers
Hope in a Cold Climate

Nihad Bunar

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Education International

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Nihad Bunar
Stockholm, October 2017

Introduction

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse major patterns of response from Swedish authorities and institutions towards newly arrived, asylum-seeking and refugee children during the last decade. The term "response" refers to organised and structured actions undertaken and measures deployed by the Swedish government and its judicial and educational branches through imposing new regulations, providing support and allocating resources; by local governments and local educational authorities through providing equal education of high quality for newly arrived children and catering for their welfare and health; by other organisations, primarily teacher unions, directly or indirectly engaged in the reception and inclusion of newly arrived children and their families.

Concerning the second premise of the aim, "the last decade", although Sweden has a long tradition of receiving migrant children (refugees and non-refugees) relative to other European nations, stretching back to World War II and its aftermath, and although a sudden arrival of relatively large numbers of refugees is nothing new[1], the trend since at least 2011 is marked by several important events. Firstly, the crises in the Middle East continued to fuel long-standing refugee flows from Iraq and gave rise to new refugee flows from Syria. In 2015, Sweden received the highest number of refugees in one year ever, around 163,000 (including approx. 71,000 children), the majority of whom were from Syria. Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia are continuously among the top citizenships of asylum-applicants.[2] Secondly, the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum has increased unprecedentedly since 2007, from 1,264 to over 35,000 in 2015. In 2016, restrictions in asylum policy and tighter border control saw that number drop to around 2,200.[3] In addition, the demographic characteristics with respect to the age and educational background of asylum-seeking children in families and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children changed compared to previous refugee flows. The possible implications of this change for the educational system and children's educational opportunities will be explored later on in the article. Thirdly, the entire Swedish policy and the basic approach to the educational rights of newly arrived children was overhauled, resulting in what could be considered as one of the world's most

1 In 1992, 84,000 asylum-seekers, mainly from Bosnia and Kosovo, sought refuge in Sweden. (https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Oversikter-och-statistik-fran-tidigare-ar.html, Retrieved on 2 April 2017.)
2 Ibid.
3 Eurostat (2017).

comprehensive education legislation devised for this group of students (Crul, Keskiner, Schneider, Lelie & Ghaeminia, 2016). Some of the main elements of these regulations, policies and additional measures will be further explained in the article.

Methodologically, the article is primarily based on the author's previously published research (Bunar, 2010, 2012, 2014a, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017b; Nilsson Folke & Bunar, 2016; Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017). It also includes analyses based on heretofore unpublished empirical data on bilingual classroom assistants, collected within the framework of the *Newly arrived and learning* (2011-2015) research programme. The article is also based on other research literature, reports from government agencies (Swedish National Agency for Education, National School Inspection, Department of Education), media accounts, and information from teacher unions. Education International's previous report on Sweden was also consulted (Bourgonje, 2010).

The article starts with an overview of the latest reforms, definitions, and policies with regard to the educational rights of newly arrived children. The following section contains three interlinked topics: newly arrived in elementary schools, unaccompanied minors and the language introduction programme at the upper-secondary level, and a brief account of some major opportunities partly deriving from government measures (i.e. more resources to municipalities) and partly from the children's own resources. The third section deals with education unions and refugee teachers, with concluding remarks and general recommendations in the final section.

Definitions and policies

Prior to 2016, no official definition existed of who constituted a newly arrived student in Swedish schools (i.e. based on the length of residence). Furthermore, there were no regulations at national level providing guidance for local educational authorities on how to organise work with newly arrived students. The status of certain rights, such as the right to bilingual classroom assistance, was unclear. Was this a right inscribed in legislation, or just a recommendation? Prior to 1 July 2013, undocumented children did not have legal access to education, although they could be admitted at the discretion of the school principal (Bunar, 2015).

The government and local authorities were heavily criticised in several reports for neglecting this group of students and their right to equal education (Skolinspektionen, 2009; Bunar, 2010, 2012). The reports revealed that students were often automatically placed in separate classes, where they could spend up to three years learning Swedish as a Second Language with limited access to other academic subjects. Students who were interviewed for these reports (see also Svensson & Eastmond, 2013) highlighted social isolation and physical segregation as one of their largest problems; conditions for transition from separate to ordinary classes were unclear; and there was limited understanding and incorporation of students' previous knowledge and experiences into teaching. Even when the previous knowledge was mapped, there was confusion about how to use it in daily teaching practices; other documentation on students' progress was lacking; students did not have access to bilingual classroom assistance and there were no consequences for schools that failed to provide it; and communication with newly arrived parents was virtually non-existent. The list was long.

Beginning in 2011, the government appointed several national commissions to overhaul legislation and propose a new policy package in response to this criticism and public concern over newly arrived students' educational conditions, and as an attempt to reduce the growing achievement gap between migrant and non-migrant students.

The first major educational reform concerning newly arrived students was introduced in 2011 at upper-secondary level. In addition to the two existing national programmes (vocational and university preparation tracks), a third one, the so-called Introduction Programme, consisting of five tracks, was established.

Students eligible for the national programmes needed to have grades in 12 (university preparation) and eight (vocational) subjects. The total number of

subjects is 16. Eligible students also required pass grades in the so-called core subjects of Swedish/Swedish as a Second Language, English and Mathematics.

Students not eligible for these two programmes could enter one of the tracks of the Introduction Programme, leading to either a transfer to a national programme or a certificate (which is not equivalent to a graduation diploma) after three years. One of the tracks of the Introduction Programme, the language introduction programme, is specially designed to admit newly arrived students, i.e. students without sufficient knowledge in Swedish. Every student follows an individual schedule depending on their amount of prior schooling and what they need in order to become eligible to enrol in national programmes or other Introduction Programme tracks. The individual plan could entail studying the core subjects at the level corresponding to the last year of elementary school, becoming an apprentice in a company, or studying other subjects. The individual schedule is expected to be reviewed and updated at least four times per year together with a student's mentor (Skolverket, 2017c, p.43) or according to students' needs at any time. During the 2016/17 academic year, the programme was attended by 35,900 children (79 per cent male, 21 per cent female, see Skolverket, 2017a). It is the fourth largest programme in Swedish upper-secondary schools, enrolling approximately one in ten of all students (Skolverket, 2017b, p.18). The majority of students are unaccompanied minors, and their particular challenges and the language introduction programme will be explored more closely later on in this article.

The second substantial reform was enacted in July 2013, granting undocumented children legal access on equal terms to elementary (including pre-school class, age six) and upper-secondary schools. Thus, today all children residing in Sweden, irrespective of their migration status, have a right to education. Furthermore, the national government assumed economic responsibility for the reform. Every year, municipalities with undocumented children in their schools can apply for additional resources. At the time of the reform, an estimated 2,000-3,000 children were undocumented (Skolverket, 2015, p.10) and around €2.5 million was allocated to 94 municipalities (Skolverket, 2013a). Today, that number is probably higher, due to the high number of asylum applications that were denied in 2016-2017, particularly for unaccompanied children. In the autumn of 2016, the National Agency for Education allocated approximately €5 million to the municipalities to cover additional costs for this group of students.[4]

The third major reform, concerning for the most part only elementary schools, was enacted in January 2016 through amendments to the Education Act. It is basically composed of four elements.

4 https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statsbidrag/grundskole-och-gymnasieutbildning/papperslosa-barn-1.203490. Retrieved on 10 September 2017.

1. *Definition* – The government articulated an official legal definition of what it means to be labelled as a newly arrived student (3 kap. 12a § Skollagen 2010:800). Briefly, children who lived abroad and move to Sweden after the autumn semester's start in the year they turn seven are considered as newly arrived irrespective of the reasons for migration: refugee, family reunion, children of labour migrants, and even children born to Swedish parents who grew up abroad. A child is considered newly arrived up to four years after arrival to a Swedish school. It means that resources, measures, and policies designated to cater to the newly arrived can be applied within this timeframe.

2. *Compulsory mapping* (in Swedish *kartläggning*) – The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has, in cooperation with universities, produced material for mapping students' prior knowledge and experiences. Basic literacy and numeracy, home language and, eventually, school language, the way of learning, favourite and less favourite subjects, and competency in various subjects are examined and a portfolio is produced for each student. Then, learning is organised based on the portfolio and information on the students' development is updated continuously through discussions and observations. The mapping is compulsory and the first step should be conducted within two months of a student's arrival in the school.

3. *Preparatory classes* – A new organisational form for newly arrived students, preparatory classes (in Swedish *förberedelseklasser*), was devised. As previously mentioned, newly arrived students were being placed in these classes for many years, albeit without an underpinning legislative framework. Since January 2016, preparatory classes have been "legalised", but with some limitations. Currently, the school principal decides, partly based on the results of initial mapping and partly on social circumstances (friends, siblings), whether to place a newly arrived child in a preparatory or in ordinary class (so-called direct immersion). It means that individual circumstances will be considered in every case and no-one will be automatically directed to one or another form of class, simply because of his/her status as newly arrived. Furthermore, a student can spend a maximum of two years in a preparatory class and the placement is only partial, meaning that a student has to be provided with some activities with a mainstream class. However, the number of hours per week or the nature of the activities are not regulated. These restrictions have been implemented in order to avoid segregation and social isolation.

4. *Reallocation of teaching hours* – During the introductory period but not exceeding a year, teaching hours may be reallocated from other subjects to Swedish or Swedish as a Second Language. At a minimum,

students will be granted an equal amount of teaching hours as all other students during the remaining time in school (see Bunar, 2017a).

This new legislation is an important step in providing a structure of opportunity for newly arrived children to succeed in school. It is also in line with recommendations presented in previous research (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013; Bunar, 2015a; Lahdenpäre & Sundgren, 2017; Sharif, 2017) and in various documents and evaluations (Skolverket, 2012, 2014; Skolinspektionen, 2009, 2014, 2015, 2017a, 2017c; Länsstyrelsen Dalarnas län, 2013; Länsstyrelsen Södermanlands län, 2014; Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015). Today, policy around newly arrived students is characterised by clear governance and oversight by local educational authorities, principals and teachers, strengthened rights to bilingual classroom assistance at all levels, individualised approaches, and efforts to avoid social and pedagogical exclusion.

At grassroots level, the implementation of policy in elementary schools has not been subject to comprehensive evaluation yet, although National School Inspection has scrutinised various aspects of their work in several audit reports (see next section). However, its initial implementation coincided with efforts to accommodate the exponential number of children who arrived as asylum-seekers since 2014.

The National School Inspection's audit of the language introduction programme at upper-secondary level (Skolinspektionen, 2017a) concluded that: only a few schools manage to meet the students' educational needs; not all principals and teachers are aware that individualised student schedules have to be produced, followed, evaluated, and updated; students tend to be treated as one single collective; expectations remain low; bilingual classroom assistance is not always provided; in some schools, students are offered only 13 hours weekly at school (it should be at least 20, according to Skolverket, 2017c); school health organisations remain undersized, which is particularly important for unaccompanied minors who may suffer from physical or psychological trauma (Eide & Hjern, 2013). Clearly, there is a gap between policy and practice, and between good intentions at national level and outcomes at local level. The language introduction programme will be explored more closely in the next section.

My conclusion is therefore that Swedish authorities should shift the focus of their interest from legislative and policy (document producing) efforts to identifying the obstacles encountered in school by principals, teachers, the newly arrived, and their parents. Supporting refugees themselves and acknowledging their resources, supporting school professionals and local communities, financially and through professional development, should be the next decisive step in order to affect the policy's local outcomes, which are outlined hereafter.

Newly arrived in Swedish schools – challenges and opportunities

This section addresses three main topics:

(i) Newly arrived students in elementary schools, their numbers, social and demographic characteristics, achievement and challenges

(ii) Unaccompanied minors and the language introduction programme at upper-secondary level

(iii) Recent government measures, as well as resources possessed by newly arrived children themselves

Elementary schools and the newly arrived

According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2016a, p.2), in the autumn of 2008, there were 30,200 newly arrived students[5] attending elementary schools, corresponding to 3.4 per cent of all students. Seven years later, in the autumn of 2015, the number had increased to 49,500, or 5.1 per cent of all students. However, the largest leap was between the academic years of 2014/15 and 2015/16, when the number increased from 41,800 to 49,500.

Table 1. The ten most common countries of birth among newly arrived students in elementary schools, in the autumn of 2015.

Country of birth	Number	Percentage %	Boys %	Girls %
Syria	11,833	24.2	53.0	47.0
Somalia	8,584	17.6	51.6	48.4
Afghanistan	2,680	5.5	58.2	41.8
Iraq	1,738	3.6	53.9	46.1
Poland	1,635	3.3	51.3	48.7
Thailand	1,524	3.1	47.4	52.6
Eritrea	1,453	3.0	53.5	46.5
Iran	1,362	2.8	53.7	46.3
Serbia	653	1.3	49.9	50.1
Turkey	630	1.3	53.0	47.0
Total	32,092	65.7		

Source: Skolverket (2016a, p.5)

5 Newly arrived students are defined here as those who have arrived in the last four years.

As evident from Table 1, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq accounted for more than half of all newly arrived children in elementary school in 2015. These countries have also dominated refugee migration statistics for many years (since 2012 in the case of Syria).

According to a recent study covering the period between 1988 and 2015 (Grönqvist & Niknami, 2017), there is a significant and growing achievement gap between children born in Sweden and those born abroad. Interestingly, there were no differences in school achievement for students who arrived before they turned seven (age of compulsory schooling) and those who arrived after the official school start in 1988. Since then, the groups drifted apart considerably, reaching a peak in 2008. Those who arrived before they turned seven have slightly improved their results, while those who migrated thereafter performed considerably poorly during this period. However, Grönqvist and Niknami's study shows that children born in Asia and Africa, in particular, had the poorest progress. Students born in other Nordic countries and in the EU had the best grades among the newly arrived. There are at least three significant reasons behind these differences:

(i) Students arriving from other Nordic and EU countries are children of labour migrants and it can be assumed that their move to Sweden contained a certain amount of planning, preparing and organising. Students from Asia and Africa are mostly refugees, with many having spent years in transit camps in Kenya, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iran. The trauma of the arduous route across the Mediterranean[6] means that these children have different experiences of what it means to leave their native country and under what circumstances they arrive in Sweden.

(ii) Varying reasons for migration lead to at least initial and temporary differential class positions in Sweden for refugees in comparison with labour migrants. It takes many years for adult refugees to obtain employment. For many, a steady job remains an illusion and they easily find themselves entangled in a lifelong circle of welfare programmes and language courses. From previous sociological studies, and as confirmed in Grönqvist and Niknami's study, it is evident that parents' socioeconomic background (education and employment) to a large extent affects students' achievement. When accounting for parents' backgrounds, the gap between students born in Sweden and those born abroad diminishes by 35 per cent (Grönqvist & Niknami, 2017, p.65). Additionally, the socioeconomic background also determines a family's choice of where to resettle. Thus, many newly arrived families end up in socially marginalised neighbourhoods with overwhelmingly immigrant-origin populations. Segregation accounts for almost half

6 See additional information on International Organization for Migration website: www.iom.int

of the achievement gap between students born in Sweden and those born abroad (ibid. p.66; see also Brunello & De Paola, 2017).

(iii) The average age for refugee children from different regions varies considerably. According to Grönqvist and Niknami (2017, p.60): "It is in this context relevant to underline that students born in Africa on average are much older at the time they arrive in Sweden compared to other regions. Our data show that the average age at the time of arrival is 10.2 years for students born in Africa, 8.8 years for Asia, 8.6 years for EU28, 7.9 for Europe, 6.8 for Nordic countries and 7.6 for South America."

To summarise, the number of newly arrived children in Swedish elementary schools has increased significantly during the last three to four years, accounting today for 5.1 per cent of all students. Students who immigrate after the age at which students begin school (age seven) run a considerably higher risk of not becoming eligible for national programmes at upper-secondary level. Those who are most vulnerable are children born in Africa (Somalia and Eritrea) and Asia (Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan), so called late arrivals (age nine and older), with unemployed parents and living in socially deprived neighbourhoods. Some of these factors represent a set of constant variables (age at arrival, socioeconomic background and traumatic experiences) and some could be mitigated by progressive social policy (parents' employment status and housing desegregation). It is therefore important to recognise that school achievement for newly arrived refugee children is not just a matter of well-prepared teachers and individual motivation. It is a part of the comprehensive social or integration policy for the inclusion of entire families in local communities and connecting them to a structure of opportunity with regard to employment, education and civic engagement.

When it comes to education, it is important to recognise newly arrived students as individuals with various backgrounds, challenges and strengths, who should never be treated as a collective, homogenous group. However, there are weaknesses in the way elementary schools organisationally and pedagogically treat newly arrived youth, which have been identified in several National School Inspection audit reports (Skolinspektionen 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017c). These range from poorly conducted initial mapping and lack of communication when a child moves to another municipality to absent principals and insufficiently tracked academic progress of the students (Bunar, 2017a, p.10). Particularly troublesome is that more than a half of 28 audited municipalities and free school[7] providers "solve a large amount of pedagogical challenges by deploying

7 Free schools (in Swedish *friskolor*) are labelled as independent or semi-private. They are completely financed through universal student vouchers and obliged to follow national school curriculum and other requirements, in the same manner as public schools (in Swedish *kommunala skolor*). The only difference is that free schools could be run by private businesses, non-profit companies, religious organisations, private corporations etc. (see Bunar & Ambrose, 2016).

general organisational models, hoping they will fit all newly arrived children" (Skolinspektionen, 2017c, p.5). Thus, segregation and over-generalisation are among the most salient barriers to inclusion of newly arrived students in schools and society. They can and must be addressed.

Unaccompanied minors in upper-secondary schools

Unaccompanied minors are defined (Prop.2005/06:46) as children under the age of 18 and, at the time of arrival in Sweden, are separated from both parents or from another adult considered to be a legal guardian. In 2015, Sweden received the highest number of unaccompanied minors in the EU. The year after, the number plummeted to 2,200. According to statistical figures from Eurostat (2017, p.2):

> In 2016, the highest number of asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors was registered in Germany (with almost 36 000 unaccompanied minors, or 57% of all those registered in the EU Member States), followed by Italy (6 000, or 10%), Austria (3 900, or 6%), the United Kingdom (3 200, or 5%), Bulgaria (2 750, or 4%), Greece (2 350, or 4%) and Sweden (2 200, or 3%). Among Member States with more than 1 000 asylum seekers considered to be unaccompanied minors in 2016, numbers rose most compared with the previous year in Greece (over 1 900 more unaccompanied minors in 2016 than in 2015, or +46%), Germany (13 700 more, or +61%), Bulgaria (935 more, or +51%) and Italy (1 950 more, or +48%). In contrast, the largest decreases were recorded in Sweden (with over 33 000 fewer unaccompanied minors in 2016 than in 2015, or -94%), Hungary (7 600 fewer, or -86%), Belgium (1 800 fewer, or -64%), the Netherlands (2 150 fewer, or -56%) and Austria (4 400 fewer, or -53%).

To reiterate, the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Sweden decreased from 2015 to 2016 by 94 per cent. The primary reasons for this are changes in migration policy indicating tougher assessment on asylum applications, stricter deployment of the Dublin Convention (stipulating that an asylum-seeker should apply for refugee status in the first safe country of arrival), re-imposed border controls, more frequently issued temporary protection status (instead of permanent residence) and further restricted rules for family reunion. After the terrorist attack in Stockholm in April 2017, perpetrated by a former asylum-seeker from Uzbekistan whose application had been rejected in several judicial instances, but who continued to live and work in Sweden, public voices advocating a more effective deportation policy grew stronger. The Swedish government has intensified negotiations with the government in Afghanistan around repatriation of unaccompanied minors who were denied asylum. The

summer of 2017 was also marked by several weeks long protests in Stockholm and elsewhere by unaccompanied minors who were denied asylum.

The majority of unaccompanied minors are from Afghanistan (around 23,000 in 2015), Syria, Iraq, and Somalia (Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017) and their welfare falls under the remit of local social service agencies. When a child has contact with the National Migration Board (NMB) and applies for asylum, local social services in that municipality are alerted and children are given into their care. Although there is no detention or custody assigned, the police should be notified if a child absconds. Social services provide an unaccompanied child with housing, mainly in so-called HVB homes (Home for care and residence), or in foster homes. The NMB can decide, after a brief initial period, to send a child to another municipality (to avoid having too many in one place), where he/she will await the final outcome of their asylum application. The NMB appoints a legal representative to advocate for a child's migration case and starts actively looking for the child's parents or other relatives. Even in the new municipality, social services have overall responsibility for the child. Apart from providing housing, they also appoint a legal guardian, contact the local school, and confirm that social welfare is paid (Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012). Consequently, it could be argued that unaccompanied minors in Sweden are surrounded by a broad network of national and local welfare and legal institutions catering to their needs (Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017).

Support is terminated when a child turns 18. The support is also withdrawn if unaccompanied minors are still underage and one or both parents arrive in Sweden. If a child is granted asylum while still under the age of 18, then they will continuously have the support of local social services. However, that age criterion has attracted comment in Swedish media lately, primarily the question of whether unaccompanied children, often without any legal document upon arrival, really are under the age of 18. Medical tests can be conducted to determine the age of young asylum-seekers, despite protests from many stakeholders, non-government organisations (NGOs) and medical experts.[8]

With regard to education, unaccompanied minors are admitted to either elementary or upper-secondary school (or to special schools for disabled children, if relevant) according to their age. Since the majority are aged between 15 and 17, they will end up in the previously mentioned language introduction programme. The programme's remit is to prepare newly arrived students to progress to other introduction, vocational or university preparation programmes (granting degrees and, for some, eligibility for higher education) but this process

8 See for example:
http://www.arbetarbladet.se/gavleborg/ockelbo/kritik-mot-aldersbedomning-av-ensamkommande-flyktingbarn-det-har-skapat-en-enorm-oro-pa-boendena;
https://www.svt.se/nyheter/vetenskap/aldersbedomningar-ar-ovetenskapliga;
http://www.sydsvenskan.se/2015-11-24/lakarkritik-mot-aldersbestamning;
http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/lakare-domer-ut-aldersbestamning/

takes time. According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2016b, p.6), only about nine per cent of students who enrolled in the language introduction programme in 2011 successfully graduated from a national programme four years later. In 2016, five years later, the number increased to 20 per cent (Skolverket, 2017b, p.28). Among them, eight per cent graduated from vocational and seven per cent from university preparation programmes. Additionally, five per cent were awarded a student certificate (ibid.).

The language introduction programme is obviously in need of improvement. After conducting its latest audit of the programme in 42 upper-secondary schools across the country, the National School Inspection (Skolinpektionen, 2017a) issued a news release with the heading: "The language introduction program at upper-secondary schools needs to be improved" (Skolinspektionen, 2017b). It continues:

> "Many upper-secondary schools with language introduction do not meet students' educational needs. Students often study a few subjects according to the same schedule, irrespective of their previous knowledge." (Skolinspektionen, 2017b. p.1)

It is also evident from previous Swedish and international studies that the physical separation of unaccompanied minors into their own programme is unnecessary and an obstacle to learning the language, making friends, and earning passing grades (Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017; Pastoor, 2015). These findings also apply to newly arrived students in elementary schools, regardless of whether they have arrived alone or with families (Nilsson Folke, 2017). In addition, this viewpoint is supported by a EU Commission study (2013) that argues:

> Analysis revealed that the effectiveness of targeted educational support measures is undermined by less inclusive education environments. The best results can be expected when the inclusion of NAMS [newly arrived migrant students] is addressed through an integrated approach: a combination of regulatory and managerial reforms aimed to make the education system more inclusive accompanied with well-financed targeted measures to provide NAMS with comprehensive support to eliminate their educational disadvantage. It is essential to avoid school segregation as it impedes successful integration of NAMS into formal education. (p.8)

Even if a language introduction programme is located in a school with other programmes, social exclusion among the newly arrived is perceived as insurmountable. As Tarik, an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan, interviewed by Farhad Jahanmahan within the framework of his PhD thesis

project at the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University in September 2014[9], put it:

> It's difficult for someone to get integrated, really difficult. We eat together, sitting next to each other in the cafeteria, but I couldn't get any contact with Swedes, I couldn't even say hello to them. Sometimes I wanted to say hello. I say hello but get no answer. They were afraid and didn't want to talk to me, I don't know why. I got no friends. Currently, I study in grade 9 at Language introduction. We are about 18-19 children in my class, but all these kids are immigrants from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. I have no Swedish friends and no Swedish classmates. But next year, if I enter the ordinary program, maybe I'll get some Swedish friends, since they have more Swedes there.

Asylum-seeking and undocumented children are eligible to enter the programme before they turn 18 (the age is 20 for Swedish citizens and those granted a residence permit). Thereafter, there are no legal educational alternatives for asylum-seekers as adult education is closed for this student category. Furthermore, they are not automatically granted the right to switch from language introduction to another national or introduction programme if they have turned 18 (Skolverket, 2017b). The consequence is that, once they meet the Swedish language proficiency standards, they could be forced to leave the educational system altogether. However, even if they do not have the legal right to further education in another programme, there is no legislation that explicitly prevents municipalities and schools from admitting them. It has been left to the discretion of schools and municipalities – but how many principals, school administrators, and study counsellors are aware of that?[10]

To summarise, unaccompanied minors represent a large group of refugee children. As such, they have faced numerous challenges during their upbringing in their native country, most notably Afghanistan and Somalia, due to decades-long conflicts and collapsed state apparatuses (Ayotte, 2000; Thomas et al., 2003; Brendler Lindqvist, 2004; Goodman, 2005; Hessle, 2009; Lay & Papadopoulus, 2009; Lundberg & Dahlqvist, 2012; Pastoor 2015). Many refugee youth experience exploitation by employers and human traffickers, uncertainty, poverty and physical and mental exhaustion during the transmigration process (see Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017, for detailed accounts of young refugees' experiences). The Swedish welfare state has well-organised structures, institutions and procedures for how to accommodate unaccompanied minors. However, there is increased evidence that the language introduction programme does not function well and, consequently, it should be closely scrutinised and reformed (Skolinspektionen, 2017a). As in the case with elementary schools,

9 As a supervisor to Jahanmahan's doctoral thesis and co-author for several articles I am grateful for the permission to refer to his empirical material in this and other contexts.
10 Quoted after Bunar (2017a, p.10).

social isolation and segregation emerge as one of the greatest obstacles for inclusion and school achievement. As Axelsson (2015) put it, language and knowledge need interactions in order to develop. Treating students in language introduction programmes as a homogenous group is another issue as well as tendencies to provide them with a limited time in school, 13 hours in some schools audited by National School Inspection (Skolinspektionen, 2017a). Finally, legal obstacles for asylum-seeking students to continue in/switch from the language introduction programme when they turn 18 are difficult to comprehend. While the municipalities are not required to provide this group with further education, they have the full freedom to do so.

Circumstances and factors that provide opportunities

This section explores some of the circumstances and factors that could be characterised as providing opportunities in this area:

(i) Recent governmental initiatives (for more detailed descriptions, see Bunar, 2017a).

(ii) Two crucial components of learning (and life) resources possessed by newly arrived refugee children.

Following the increase in refugee numbers, the national government invested in the implementation of reforms that promote the integration and achievement of migrant students in school. The common denominator for these investments is that relatively considerable resources have been made available to municipalities to apply for and invest in language learning, employing and professionally developing bilingual classroom assistants, developing teachers' didactical skills, and setting up and maintaining proper organisation for the reception of newly arrived students. The latest such investment package, announced in January 2017, allocated approximately €220 million for 2017-2025 (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017). In 2015, the Swedish National Agency for Education allocated €21 million to 46 municipalities where newly arrived students comprised at least 10 per cent of all students in the municipality (Skolverket, 2016c). Previously, in 2013 the Agency disseminated a special grant from the government to municipalities to provide students with additional hours of Swedish as a Second Language instruction (Förordningen, 2013:69).

There are other examples where the Agency has cooperated with municipalities with relatively large numbers of refugee children in order to support professional development of staff, allocating resources to enable municipalities to employ a coordinator for newly arrived children, among other initiatives. The Agency has also issued new guidelines for the implementation of national policy regulations

and the previously mentioned mapping material is available on its website (www.skolverket.se). Another important political initiative is an agreement between the government and The Association of Free Schools to allow an admission quota of newly arrived students to free schools without queuing, equivalent to at most five per cent of all students at the school. However, participation by the free schools in this programme is voluntary.[11]

Noteworthy across each of these measures is the increasing attention being paid to the professional development of school staff. A number of conferences on the newly arrived and learning have been organised over the last three to four years, but there has been little evaluation of how they work in practice. In a project for the European Commission (carried out by ICF International) entitled, *Study on governance and management practices in school systems*, I conducted interviews with the local coordinator for school development in the municipality of Hultsfred, a school principal, and a teacher about a recently concluded project on professional development of all teachers conducted by the National Centre for Swedish as a second language (Bunar, 2017b). Teachers' experiences with the training sessions were very positive as is evident from following excerpts:

> We have gotten teaching development, our teachers have more focus on teaching, they put more effort on planning and reflecting on their teaching. Collaboration has changed in a positive way, now we are doing that more as a working team around teaching. Previously, it was more oriented to organisation. We have got more concrete tools to use in teaching, something that pervades the entire organisation. School leaders are speaking more about using language-developing ways of working. The language goal is a natural part of all planning and teachers have got the same language and have become more professional... Thanks to this initiative, we have developed teaching for all students. That was a clear intention from our side, to thoroughly change school culture and school structure. (Coordinator)

> Generally, I notice an increased self-confidence among teachers. They dare to try out new ways of working. It's of course very much about doing things together and sharing, discussing and talking about teaching. It's my opinion, and here I'm a bit subjective, that equity in teaching has increased. Today, the students work together much better in the classroom. They have the same planning, but it's carried out from the perspective of their individual needs. I've noticed among my teachers that they speak differently about teaching. I believe something has happened with the language, and now I'll be very general, but those teachers who do not express interest in these questions, it's actually easier for me as a school leader to identify and further support

11 http://www.friskola.se/opinion/nyheter/ny-forordning-om-kvot-for-nyanlanda-i-friskolor. Retrieved on 28 April 2017.

> them, since there are not many anymore. And something else that is really fantastic; for many years, we worked to increase our achievement, without success. This year, 2016, with all newly arrived students, we increased our results by five per cent. It's great! (Principal)

> We set a goal to increase achievement last year; one student per class would increase achievement in Swedish/Swedish as a Second Language. But many more did it and we are so happy and proud of that. In my class, I see that my multilingual students developed more. I have no evidence, that's an estimate. But those whom I anticipated would not perform well on the national test, did. Both the feeling and the results prove we are moving forward. Changes in teaching have occurred in the entire school, but I have no evidence since I have not attended all classes and many teachers look upon language development in another way. Language-developing way of working has given results. Everyone has been through the course, we speak the same language, have the same ground to stand on. I work in a more clear way today so, yes, it has affected me. (Teacher)

Thus, it is evident that municipalities and schools should review their strategies on teachers' professional development, moving away from invited short lectures to more structured and sustainable peer-learning, supported by external experts.

The second set of circumstances and factors that could be characterised as providing opportunities focuses on crucial components of learning (and life) resources possessed by newly arrived refugee children. Two of the most salient are discussed here: ambitions and first language.

There is ample evidence in Swedish and international research (Jahanmahan & Bunar, 2017; Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013; Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Fridlund, 2013; Zembylas, 2011; Pinson, Arnot & Candappa, 2010) that newly arrived refugee students show a high level of ambition and motivation to succeed in school. In an article by Nilsson and Axelsson (2013), the interviewed students conveyed high ambitions and their dream professions were doctor, lawyer, pilot, and engineer. In other words, they saw clear and palpable opportunities in the Swedish education system but the students also expressed a strong need for help and support, pedagogical (learning) as well as social (inclusion), as evident from the following excerpt:

> For example, during the lessons, the teacher talks about, what is it called, the lesson; the others know Swedish, because they are Swedish or because they were born here, they know Swedish well. But the person who has moved new, maybe he doesn't understand some words, and if the teacher, what is it called, takes care of her or him, it's better. When I sit in, for example,

> the Swedish lesson or English, I feel bad. Because I don't get much. I don't understand much. It's really difficult. My brain is quickly tired. What is it called? Tired. Quickly. I fall asleep quickly. They [in mainstream class] have read so many words and I can't understand. It's just like to go there and sit, just listening, but not understanding. And it's boring. (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013, p.147-150)

The importance of learning Swedish as quickly as possible was also highlighted in research (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013; Nilsson Folke, 2017, Svensson, 2017). Without Swedish, it is not possible to achieve other important goals, i.e. to be "just like everybody else" and to attain their desired profession.

One of the most persistent critiques of Swedish schools with regard to the reception of newly arrived students is the failure to recognise students' previous knowledge and life experiences and their inability to use their first language as a vehicle for effective learning (Bunar, 2010, 2015a). In that context, bilingual classroom assistance has emerged as the most important pedagogical intervention. A forthcoming study by Davila and Bunar (2017) explores how a number of bilingual classroom assistants experience the basic conditions for their work. The study shows that considerable opacity surrounds their assignment and that cooperation with subject teachers is scarce. These are two major issues: in the absence of a clear job description, the bilingual classroom assistants were assigned to perform various roles; and they were perceived by other staff members as being everything from first language teachers to interpreters and cultural links between home and school, as well as classroom assistants.

Bilingual classroom assistance is a form of additional support regulated in educational legislation for both elementary and upper-secondary schools. Nevertheless, there is considerable confusion around how it can be optimally administered, how many hours students are eligible for support, and the formal qualifications required of assistants, among other things. In 2013, the Swedish National Agency for Education issued a set of guidelines (Skolverket, 2013b) advising schools to deploy bilingual classroom assistance either before, after, or in conjunction with regular classroom instruction. At first glance, this is not very clear advice, but this is exactly the kind of approach that ought to be taken. The most appropriate way of shaping the form and content of bilingual classroom assistance is to meet every student's individual circumstances, needs, strengths and challenges. Bilingual classroom assistants are expected to help throughout the various phases of mapping or screening of students' previous knowledge and experiences (initially on numeracy and literacy and, later on, in different subjects) and to assist students with acquiring knowledge in their first language or any other language the student speaks. Thus, the role of these assistants is also to support further development of newly arrived students' first language

by gradually introducing new concepts and deeper meanings of already known concepts. The point is that bilingual classroom assistants are not a passive instrument (pure translators) for conveying the content of lectures and books, but active developers of students' languages (first and Swedish) and knowledge.

Based on a previous study (Davila & Bunar, 2017), it could be argued that schools should focus on the following principles while providing bilingual classroom assistance to newly arrived students:

- In the first place, bilingual classroom assistance is provided to all newly arrived students according to their needs. They have the legal right to support and this is the most important pedagogical intervention.
- Other staff members are informed that this assistance is being provided and there is a clear understanding of the parameters of the bilingual classroom assistance and the assistants' roles.
- There is a clear structure for cooperation between bilingual classroom assistants and teachers in Swedish as a Second Language.
- Bilingual classroom assistants are "tutored" by teachers in various subjects, which means that teachers offer assistance with understanding and conveying the content of lectures and books to students in their first language.
- Bilingual classroom assistants need time, resources and recognition in order to perform their tasks to the highest possible quality. It is important that they are included in professional development opportunities and peer-learning activities.
- Bilingual classroom assistants often conduct their own initial mapping of students' prior knowledge (Davila & Bunar, 2017). Improved internal communication and cooperation would facilitate the sharing of this knowledge with other teachers.
- Bilingual classroom assistants often have good relations with newly arrived parents. Schools should find ways to use this communication channel as an opportunity to improve relations between teachers and newly arrived parents (Bunar, 2015b).
- Municipalities have uneven access to qualified bilingual assistants. Therefore, it is imperative that municipalities find new ways to cooperate, not least using various digital platforms, where municipalities lacking assistants in certain languages can get help from other municipalities.[12]

12 See Bunar (2016d) for evaluation of a project about cooperation on bilingual classroom assistants using digital platforms between municipalities in Stockholm County.

Unions and refugee teachers

This final section addresses two principal topics: [13] 1) the role of education unions and their initiatives to increase the education opportunities for newly arrived students and teachers, and, 2) the opportunities for newly arrived teachers to transfer their certificates, receive professional development, and ultimately obtain employment in Swedish schools.

The majority of Swedish teachers are organised in two unions, Lärarförbundet and Lärarnas Riksförbund (LR). Based on secondary material and an interview with an officer from Lärarförbundet[14], it could be argued that the role of unions with regard to newly arrived students and teachers is to:

- Organise courses, round tables and conferences for teachers about multilingualism, cultural diversity, and working with newly arrived students. Professional development of teachers is the overall responsibility of school owners (municipalities in the case of public schools, private interests for free schools) and these more structured activities do not seem to be conducted in any comprehensive form by the unions. One plausible explanation is that the members (teachers) are already involved in professional development through other channels.
- Provide information for newly arrived teachers about various paths to teacher certification. One such example is the material, called Restart (in Swedish *Omstart*), [15] containing basic information about the teaching profession in Sweden and links to government agencies. According to LRF, "*Omstart* is a guide for newly arrived teachers who want to enter the teaching profession in Sweden. In *Omstart*, you will find information about how to validate and/or complete your degree or certification. You will also find links to government agencies, organisations and universities that can provide you with more information and help you with any further enquiries you might have."[16]
- Disseminate information about the latest research on the newly arrived, not least through their newspapers and other media outlets; as well as information about opportunities for professional development and conferences, networking between municipalities and with

13 Some parts of this section are quoted after Bunar (2017a).
14 I am grateful to Anna Tornberg, from Lärarförbundet for information.
15 http://www.saco.se/en/omstart/swedish-educational-system/choose-your-education/teacher/. Retrieved on 8 April 2017.
16 https://www.lr.se/utvecklasiyrket/omstartfornewlyarrivedteachers.106.1b53dbb8150997befcf8f9fd.html. Retrieved on 8 April 2017.

other countries, information about government investments in and measures to improve conditions for the teacher profession, etc.

- Influence public opinion and national and local politicians in order to provide better educational opportunities for newly arrived children and teachers. One particular aspect highlighted internally (see e.g. Lärarförbundet, 2016) is the importance of first language teachers for inclusion and learning among the newly arrived and for forging stronger ties between teachers and parents. Furthermore, Lärarförbundet has demanded reallocation of resources between schools in order to support schools that receive a larger share of newly arrived children, and that the newly arrived children should be equally dispersed among all schools in a municipality (ibid.). Today, a small number of elementary schools receive the majority of newly arrived children, which leads to segregation and a poor reputation for some schools (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016).

An important aspect of the unions' actitivities is about supporting newly arrived teachers. There are currently two major initiatives at the national level. The first one, "Continuing education for migrant teachers" (in Swedish *Utländska lärares vidareutbildning, ULV*), has been in place since 2007 with Stockholm University as a national coordinator. This scheme means that newly arrived migrants who worked as certified teachers in their home countries can apply to a unique two-year university programme which includes in-service practical training. The aim is to prepare them to work as teachers in the Swedish pedagogical and social context. Another admissions requirement is advanced knowledge in the Swedish language as proven by a degree in the Swedish 3 or Swedish as a Second Language 3 course (corresponding to a degree from a national upper-secondary programme) or by taking a Swedish language proficiency exam called Tisus. The Swedish Council for Higher Education (in Swedish *Universitets- och högskolerådet, UHR*) has also received resources in order to more effectively assess university degrees from other countries.

According to the Lärarförbundet officer[17], the ULV is "a great initiative", but there are three obvious problems. Firstly, it is a short-term project, and education unions would prefer that it becomes a permanent programme. Secondly, it usually takes at least four to five years, from the day of migration/resettlement in Sweden, for migrant teachers to enter the programme. This depends partly on language skills (no degrees in Swedish 3) and, worryingly, partly on the lack of information about the ULV's existence. Thirdly, it is a challenge to get all the participants through the programme on time. Once again, the Swedish language is perceived as a major obstacle, with more support needed in order to reduce the drop-out rate of ULV students. A new initiative is to start all new ULV courses

17 Anna Tornberg, Lärarförbundet.

with a mandatory semester solely focused on scaffolding the participants' language skills.

The second initiative is called Fast-track (in Swedish *Snabbspår*). This was introduced in 2016 as:

- A response to the general shortage of teachers in Swedish schools
- The answer to the search for first language teachers and bilingual classroom assistants, especially in the Arabic language
- An attempt to expedite the teacher certification process
- A labour market measure aimed at employing at least some refugees who were granted asylum during the last few years

The Fast-track courses are 26 weeks long, including in-service training in schools and preschools, and are organised at six universities. [18] According to the interviewee from Lärarförbundet, Fast-track accelerates the process of resuming a teacher profession in Sweden. The language requirement that regulates admission to ULV has been dropped here and education is organised in Arabic solely or in Arabic and Swedish simultaneously.

The idea behind this project is to direct a newly arrived migrant with teacher education and experiences towards the path that will eventually lead them back to the teaching profession, and to do so as quickly as possible. After the course, each student receives an individualised action plan based on the course results, identified strengths and weaknesses, validation by the Swedish Council for Higher Education of their university diploma from their home country, and the Swedish National Agency for Education's response to their request for a teacher certificate.

According to the Lärarförbundet interviewee, it is imperative that the Fast-track leads to a teacher certificate. In practice, this means that most of these students must, on completion of Fast-track, also complete the ULV course in order to earn a teacher certificate. There are short-term benefits if students drop out and work in schools as bilingual classroom assistants or support teachers or work at bridging the gap between parents and teachers. However, this means that they miss out on the greater potential achievement: completing their education, earning a certificate, and becoming full-time teachers. It is particularly important that they are certified as multilingual teachers with a culturally diverse background, since almost a quarter of all students in Swedish schools are of immigrant origin.

18 http://www.su.se/lararutbildningar/larare/snabbsparet-for-nyanlanda-larare. Retrieved on 12 April 2017.

Conclusions and recommendations

This article has aimed to describe and analyse major patterns of response from Swedish authorities and institutions towards newly arrived, asylum-seeking and refugee children during the last decade. It has outlined and commented on recent policy changes, regulations concerning newly arrived students' educational rights in elementary and upper-secondary schools focusing on the situation of unaccompanied minors, statistics, some recent government measures and allocation of new resources, favourable circumstances and factors, the role of education unions, opportunities for newly arrived teachers, and much more. As well as highlighting Swedish policy as one of the most comprehensive in the world, this article has also outlined challenges and obstacles. Some of the most serious challenges and obstacles emerging in the process of policy implementation are (Bunar, 2015; Lahdenperä & Sundgren, 2017, Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017; Svensson, 2017):

- Schools are inclined to emphasise social constructions such as newly arrived, unaccompanied, refugee, Somali, Afghan, Iraqi, rather than acknowledging students' multifaceted identities. Children's social and cultural competences should not be neglected, rather they should be seen as one of many defining aspects of an individual.
- Schools are not inclined to recognise and address children's difficulties in classrooms as a consequence of their shortcomings in certain academic skills. Children's entire life-world could be reduced by putting them in their own schools and preparatory classes for several years, as defined by these shortcomings.
- Schools are not inclined to address the emotional wellbeing and exclusion of these children. Instead, they are satisfied with the physical integration of all pupils in the same building.
- Schools are not inclined to recognise shortcomings in their own daily pedagogical and social activities as an issue, but refer to more and more "hard-to-work-with" groups arriving as migrants.
- Schools are not inclined to invite parents to participate in their children's schooling, instead keeping them at a distance due to their insufficient language skills.

The role of the education unions has, despite all the goodwill, lacked visibility. The strongest impact has been made for refugee teachers. However, it is difficult to assess the impact of the dissemination of information and attempts to influence politicians which is where the unions seem particularly engaged.

However, I believe that more could be done, given the education unions' size and resources, to affect those circumstances and conditions that matter most for the educational success of newly arrived children.

Refugee teachers need more support in the Swedish language to enable them to progress through the ULV programme and secure a teaching certificate. For many, English training is also needed, along with an academic mentor to guide them through their university education. This is particularly important for migrant teachers who attend the Fast-track programme.

What more can be done? In additions to the previously mentioned recommendations and elsewhere (Bunar, 2017a), this report proposes four areas that can have the greatest effects on educational equity and quality for newly arrived children, in both the short and long term.

1. An individualised approach to every child, his/her circumstances, background and life-history is absolutely essential. The ability to recognise a child as a refugee, with all the experiences this may entail, and to see a child beyond that experience is the foremost quality of a good teacher. Children are active actors with their own resources (ambition, resilience, previous knowledge, first language etc.) and these ought to be acknowledged and harnessed in the interests of learning to attain grades and learning for citizenship.
2. The newly arrived are not just second language learners, a view which has dominated pedagogical discourse for many years. They are first and foremost learners, students at school, just like all other children. Two consequences of this argument are: a) newly arrived students ought to be provided with access to all subjects as soon as possible after a shorter introduction period with a focus on Swedish as a Second Language; b) in order to accommodate the newly arrived in ordinary classes, all teachers need to acquire skills to work with language-developing pedagogy in their subjects.
3. Segregation, and its ramifications (exclusion and isolation), is the most pernicious social condition with regard to opportunities in schools and society for newly arrived students. Concentration of migrant students in certain schools should be avoided using all possible means, including ceilings to the share of immigrants, bussing, creation of new catchment-area boundaries etc. (see Brunello & De Paola, 2017). There is ample evidence that those most negatively affected by segregation are students whose parents have received little education, and foreign-born students who arrived after the age of seven. "Overall, the message seems clear: desegregation policies are not only equitable – they provide better opportunities

to individuals with relatively low parental background – but also efficient" (Brunello & De Paola, 2017, p.46). Furthermore, educators must pay attention to how newly arrived students face isolation and exclusion in ordinary classes (Skowronski, 2013; Nilsson Folke, 2017).

4. The roles that local community, civic society and leisure activities play in providing opportunities merits investigation. Welcoming attitudes towards refugees as well as activities that facilitate language acquisition, that lead to employment and educational opportunities, and that promote a sense of social cohesion in local communities are important for the integration and wellbeing of refugees. Cultural and sports activities can provide for fun, recreational, interactive spaces for those refugees students who have recently arrived to practice their Swedish language skills. These spaces, in turn, can also provide for the majority of the national population, both native and non-native Swedes, to learn from, and interact, cooperate, and build trust with recent refugee arrivals to their country. These new-found bonds of solidarity, recognition, and respect will serve to strenghen the solidarity among the Swedish population. This is one example of how to create more sustainable attitudes of solidarity within a multi-cultural nation, which should serve to replace cooperation-building directives originating from official government policies or initatives.

To conclude, it is my hope that this article has provided an insight into Swedish policy and practice, the lessons learned from successes and failures, on reception and inclusion of the newly arrived children in the educational system. Migration is a human destiny. It will never cease to exist. New migrant groups will eventually arrive with new circumstances and in need of different pedagogical practices. It means that the policy ought to be constantly revised. However, I firmly believe that the four areas proposed above – individualised approaches, regarding the newly arrived as learners, desegregation efforts, and harnessing the rich social and cultural resources present in local communities – are cornerstones of all approaches.

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