

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MUNICIPAL WORK TOWARDS LONG-TERM INTEGRATION IN THE COUNTY OF VÄSTRA GÖTALAND



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PREFACE

Integration is a heatedly debated topic in both politics and the media. But what does the word integration actually mean? How should integration be measured, who is to be integrated into what, and when is a person integrated?

In order to gather the experiences from different municipalities' work with the establishment of newly arrived refugees in the period 2015–2018, the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland organised two dialogue days with representatives of the municipalities within the county in May 2019. To gain deeper insight into how people who work with newly arrived immigrants regard the relation between their establishment period and long-term integration, the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland commissioned the Centre on Global Migration (CGM) at Gothenburg University to conduct in-depth interviews with a number of civil servants working at municipalities and other government agencies within the County of Västra Götaland. The answers offered in the interviews differ, yet one kind of definition can be discerned nonetheless:

A newly arrived immigrant is regarded integrated once they have housing, work, power over their lives, opportunities for growth and participate in majority society.

This definition lies close to the dominant view in research where integration is described as a process that has to do with immigrated individuals' and groups' gradually increasing participation in the receiving society's institutions and social structures.

Challenges that often are named in work with the establishment and integration of newly arrived immigrants are the lack of housing, requirements of high qualification levels on the labour market, perpetual changes in both laws and prioritisations, and at times unclarity with regards to state governance on the one hand and municipal self-governance on the other. Several of these challenges can be said to be structural for society in general and do not just pertain to work with newly arrived immigrants.

It is gratifying to be able to see the positive attitude and hard work in the county that comes to light in the interviews and could be seen during the dialogue days. This is especially true against the backdrop that the interviewees rarely have the keys to solve the structural challenges they face in their work. We can also see that many good efforts are continuously

being put into the promotion of long-term establishment and integration of newly arrived immigrants in our county.

It is the County Administrative Board's hope that the experiences and conclusions that are described in this report can be regarded as additional contributions towards strengthening future work on being prepared and having capacity in the reception of newly arrived immigrants in the County of Västra Götaland.

Pia Falck

Head of Unit, Division on Integration

County Administrative Board Västra Götaland

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

The aim of this report is to contribute with increased knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in municipal work towards long-term and sustainable integration in the County of Västra Götaland. The immigration of refugees, including families, adults and unaccompanied children, increased especially in 2015. Along with changes in the regulations in integration policy, this has presented new challenges for the municipalities' work with the reception and integration of new arrivals. In recent years, the integration of immigrants into society has become a hot political topic. One of the subjects that is debated the most is how well integration is working. Some think that it is working just as it should, while others find that it is not working at all. Even though integration is discussed at all levels in society, what *integration* actually means is strikingly fuzzy. What does the concept mean? When are immigrants integrated in society? How do you measure success and failure?

The report focuses, among other things, on examining how the term integration is understood by civil servants who on a daily basis work with integration at the municipal level. Examining and discussing the meaning of the term integration is highly relevant at a time that is characterised by ideological battles over the right of interpretation in questions of immigration, integration, segregation and marginalisation.

To study civil servants' perceptions of challenges and opportunities in municipal work towards long-term sustainable integration in the County of Västra Götaland, a total of 15 interviews were conducted. Ten interviews were conducted with representatives of different municipalities within the County of Västra Götaland, and five with representatives of The Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), The Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*), The County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland (*Länsstyrelsen*), Region Västra Götaland¹ and The Gothenburg Region.² The interviews were supplemented

1 Region Västra Götaland is the county council governing the territory Västra Götaland in Sweden. Its aim is to provide conditions for a good, meaningful and healthy life. Main mission include ensuring that the population in Västra Götaland has access to medical care, developing and administering culture, public transport, growth and sustainable development. See <https://www.vgregion.se/en/>.

2 The Gothenburg Region (GR) is a co-operative organisation uniting thirteen municipalities in western Sweden with a total population of about 1 million. The task of the association is to promote cooperation over municipal borders and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences within the region. GR focuses on issues such as regional planning, the environment, traffic, labour market, welfare and social services, competence development, education, and research. See <https://goteborgsregionen.se/>.

by observations at the two dialogue days for knowledge exchange entitled ‘Municipalities’ experiences of establishment and integration in the County of Västra Götaland between the years 2015 and 2018. What has worked well, and which knowledge should we build on further?’. The dialogue days were organised by the County Administrative Board with the aims of collecting positive experiences in the reception of newly arrived immigrants in the County of Västra Götaland and of identifying factors for success for the sustainable reception of new arrivals in the long term. Altogether, representatives of 29 of the county’s 49 municipalities participated at the event.

INTEGRATION – A SUITABLE TERM?

The interviews and observations in this study confirm what previous research has highlighted, namely that defining the meaning of the term *integration* is a complex matter. According to several of the respondents, there are other words that are better suited than the term *integration*. Those are *reciprocity*, *establishment*, *inclusion* and *participation*, among others. While political goals behind the term *integration* are aimed at something positive, such as inclusion in social life on equal terms, integration can also be understood as something negative and exclusionary if immigrants are depicted as culturally and economically problematic. Several respondents find that there is a discursive problem with the term *integration* that can lead to thinking in terms of ‘us and them’. The ethnically Swedish majority (‘us’) is then defined as already integrated and unproblematic, while foreign-born people (‘them’) are defined as a deviant group that poses a problem for societal development. In many cases, respondents talked about working with integration as a form of inclusion of new arrivals in the communities that were present in the different municipalities. Inclusion however does not happen entirely without making demands, several respondents claimed. The newly arrived migrants are also responsible for their own integration in the municipalities. Their responsibilities include, among other things, learning the language and rules as well as the values held in the new society. On the whole, there is a dominant perception that integration is a process that has to do with the immigrated individuals’ and groups’ gradually increasing participation in the receiving society’s institutions and social structures.

The respondents were also asked to answer the question of when they consider a person to be integrated in society. The following perception was quite common: a person is considered to be integrated if they have a place to live, a job, power over their own lives, opportunities for development and also participate in majority society. According to most respondents, a job and financial self-sufficiency should however be considered to be the most important in deeming a person to be integrated in society. Based on the respondents’ accounts, it also became clear that the main goal in municipal politics is to help newly arrived immigrants to become financially self-sufficient as soon as possible.

COOPERATION FOR LONG-TERM INTEGRATION

The respondents were also asked how well the cooperation between different organisations and activities in the municipalities was working with regards to the integration of immigrants,

and what they considered to be key factors for success when cooperating with internal and external partners. The respondents' answers indicate that cooperation works well when it comes to the aim of improving newly arrived immigrants' opportunities to establish themselves in society as quickly as possible. While cooperation with civil society often is described in positive terms, most respondents pointed out that the municipalities' cooperation with the Swedish Public Employment Service could work better. The municipalities' cooperation with the Public Employment Service is perceived to have suffered because of reorganisations and the high workload within the Public Employment Service. Some respondents also highlight that cooperation with businesses and the industry need to be developed and made more efficient. Respondents from small municipalities also called for a more thought-through and institutionalised form of cooperation across municipal borders, for example in relation to education in Swedish for immigrants and civic orientation. Such cooperation would allow for effective establishment programmes and long-term programmes for integration.

The respondents highlight a number of key factors for successful cooperation within the field of integration: a shared approach, clear goals, good qualifications, and time as well as opportunities to meet. They emphasise the importance of clear political guidance, with higher-level decisions on clear routines and guidelines. Cooperation loses efficiency when there is a lack of thought-through and well-established strategies for work and when cooperation builds on individual employees rather than well-established routines. Some respondents also called for new forms of cooperation where more segments of society, including immigrants themselves, can be heard and can participate in the identification of relevant issues as well as in the development of strategies and concrete initiatives.

NATIONAL VERSUS LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF INTEGRATION POLICY

The respondents were also asked to describe the greatest challenges in their work with the establishment and integration of new arrivals. Some of the challenges that were noted pertain to the fact that integration policy is defined at state level. In Sweden, the government is responsible for the formulation of Swedish integration policy. Since the implementation of the Establishment Reform (*Lagen om etableringsinsatser för vissa nyanlända*, SFS 2010:197) in the year 2010, the overall responsibility for the introduction of newly arrived immigrants to society has been centralised and now lies with the Swedish Public Employment Service. The municipalities however are important actors in work with newly arrived immigrants. The municipality is both educational organiser and employer, and can use its contacts in the local industries and civil society in order to advance the establishment of new arrivals.

The study shows that the respondents wish that local politicians and public officials at the highest levels took a clear stance on the direction that work with newly arrived immigrants is to take within each municipality. A recurring theme in the interviews is that there is a need for clear roles, mandates, and a strong will among the leaders to reach success in working with the establishment of newly arrived immigrants. Several respondents would like the municipalities to be allowed to adapt national guidelines to their local conditions because the national legislation creates problems for the municipalities. Ambiguities in legislation are

considered to be an obstacle in work with integration as they make it more difficult to enforce national political decisions at the local level, to make adjustments to the ways the work is organised, and to be able to make preparations in time. One respondent expressed the desire to transfer the entire responsibility for the integration of newly arrived immigrants to the municipalities. At the same time, others emphasised the importance of equal treatment of immigrants in different municipalities, which underscores the importance of responsibility lying with the state. One thing that however could clearly be discerned was a desire for a clear distribution of responsibilities regarding the establishment and integration of new arrivals, both between the state and the municipal level and between different government agencies.

PROJECTIFICATION OF INTEGRATION POLICY MEASURES

Another challenge that several respondents highlighted pertains to the so-called ‘projectification’ of integration policy measures, which many find to be an obstacle to long-term work with integration. The existence of different local projects and initiatives is considered to generate poor conditions for long-term and sustainable integration because the projects often are short-term and depend on external funding that is limited in time. When projects are evaluated, focus lies on measurable outcomes that are delimited in time and space, rather than on the attainment of more long-term goals. According to several respondents, it is rare that the experiences and results from completed integration-related projects are taken account of in permanent programmes. Instead of implementing results and knowledge in permanent programmes, a large share of the time is dedicated to finding new funding bodies or developing new projects that are based on the funding bodies’ prioritisations and desires.

HOUSING SHORTAGE AND THE DIFFICULTY OF BECOMING FINANCIALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT MAKE INTEGRATION MORE DIFFICULT

Another area that many respondents identify as a challenge to the integration of newly arrived immigrants is the question of housing. According to our respondents, the fact that most municipalities do not have enough housing for newly arrived immigrants makes the remaining work with the group more difficult, which in turn also influences the conditions for successful integration. The shortage in housing leads to temporary solutions, which in turn leads to poorer conditions for establishment. At the same time, the municipalities’ costs for economic support increase. This is however an area that, according to our respondents, is difficult to influence for civil servants working with integration-related questions at the municipalities.

Yet another challenge that has emerged in our interviews is that it is difficult for newly arrived immigrants to become financially self-sufficient. The respondents emphasise that a significant share of the newly arrived who establish themselves do not have the education and experience that match the occupations available in the labour market. Most respondents also expressed their concerns regarding growing subcultures, gang crime, racism, marginalisation, and segregated schools and neighbourhoods. All respondents stated that the large-scale reception of both those who are assigned to the municipality and those who choose their

own place of residence has brought about challenges for municipal work. These challenges have to do with being forced to find housing and places in childcare on short notice, starting preparatory classes and primary school classes, strengthening the municipality's social services and so on. The increasing costs for economic support were also brought forward as a problem in part for the municipalities' finances, but also for the newly arrived immigrants who do not become financially self-sufficient after the state-run establishment programmes end.

A CLEAR VISION AND POLITICAL WILL ARE CRUCIAL FOR LONG-TERM INTEGRATION

To summarise, the data gathered here sheds light onto the different conditions and complex challenges that municipalities constantly face in their work with integration. On the one hand, municipalities are restricted in their actions due to ambiguities in legislation and a lack of clear guidelines. On the other hand, the municipalities' autonomy creates opportunities to run different integration programmes for newly arrived immigrants at the local level. The study shows that civil servants in many municipalities wish for clearer roles and mandates as well as a political will among the leaders to attain long-term success in work with the establishment of newly arrived immigrants. For the reception of newly arrived immigrants in a municipality to get the space and resources that are needed, the issue needs to be prioritised and be regarded as a part of the municipality's permanent work. Today, many municipalities lack a clear vision and political will with regards to how long-term integration is to be achieved.

There are many sides to integration; it is about work, education, social contexts and language. Long-term integration occurs when an immigrant finds an occupation, is given the opportunity to create an independent existence and can contribute to society. In order to achieve long-term sustainable integration, there is a need for a clear political mission and a long-sightedness in the approach to integration. There is a need for a clear distribution of responsibilities in work with integration and a well-functioning cooperation between all actors involved. In addition, knowledge is required. It's about monitoring developments in the field, sharing experiences with one another as well as taking advantage of skills and past experiences. It is also important to promote a positive image of immigration and integration.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to contribute with increased knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in municipal work towards long-term and sustainable integration in the County of Västra Götaland. The immigration of refugees, including families, adults and unaccompanied children, increased especially in 2015. Along with changes in the regulations in integration policy, this has presented new challenges for the municipalities' work with the reception and integration of new arrivals. Between 2015 and 2018, 36 916 newly arrived immigrants³ were received in the County of Västra Götaland. Of these, 4 045 were unaccompanied children who had been granted a residence permit (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019a). Municipalities present the first point of contact for newly arrived immigrants and migrants, which means that a well-functioning integration policy at the municipal level is of great significance. Municipalities must work to ascertain long-term integration of new citizens, who otherwise run the risk of ending up outside of society without access to the labour market, housing, health care or education. Integration work is however characterised by complex challenges. In their work towards creating conditions for long-term and sustainable integration, municipalities have to take into account both local conditions and broader – sometimes global – contextual factors. The municipalities' work with the reception and integration of new arrivals is influenced by multilevel governance, where political strategies are formulated at local, national, European and sometimes global levels. In addition, economic and social development and transformation occur unevenly geographically, which causes different municipalities to face different challenges. Varying conditions regarding, for example, population, business and labour market, the built environment and existing infrastructure mean that the local conditions for working for a sustainable integration of new arrivals differ between the municipalities.

3 A newly arrived immigrant is here defined as a person who has been granted a residence permit as a refugee or for other protective reasons, as well as a person who has received a residence permit because of their connection to such a person. There is no commonly accepted end-date for how long a person is considered 'newly arrived', but one commonly found definition is that it refers to the time period during which the individual is included in the Swedish Public Employment Service's establishment programme, which is a maximum of two years. (In school, a different definition of newly arrived immigrants is used which includes asylum seekers as well as children with residence permits). (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019)

Another challenge is that the municipalities, just like other actors in society, have to relate to the much-debated concept of *integration*. With the relatively large scale of immigration to Sweden in recent years, the integration of immigrants into society has become a hot political topic. One of the topics that is debated the most is how well integration is working. Some think that it is working just as it should, while others find that it is not working at all. Even though integration is discussed at all levels in society, what *integration* actually means is strikingly fuzzy. What does the concept mean? When are immigrants integrated in society? How do you measure integration policy-related success and failure? Which is the most suitable term to use to describe the processes that new arrivals go through in the new country? Apart from *integration*, the terms *assimilation*, *inclusion*, *establishment*, *reception*, *adjustment* and *diversity* are central in the Swedish integration debate.

In this report we will examine how the term *integration* is understood by civil servants who on a daily basis work with integration at the municipal level. By examining how civil servants themselves define the concept, what obstacles to integration they see and which goals they are working towards, we also want to find out when they consider a person to be integrated. We consider it to be highly relevant and important to examine and discuss the meaning of the concept of *integration* at the municipal level at a time that is characterised by ideological battles over the right of interpretation in questions of immigration, integration, segregation and marginalisation. Furthermore, we will examine how civil servants perceive and analyse challenges and opportunities in municipal work towards long-term and sustainable integration. Focus here lies on governance and cooperation. Integration is a complex cross-sectoral political field. Few questions cut across different sectors of society in the way that integration policy does. Integration policy affects all levels, from the individual to the neighbourhood, school, from the municipality to the state, and all sectors – labour market, business, social services, education, housing, the legal system, culture and so on. Today, different initiatives aiming to ease the reception, establishment and integration of new arrivals into municipalities are run by public, private as well as non-profit organisations. The challenge to policy lies in bringing about an effective coordination between these actors at different levels of governance: the national, regional and local levels. In this study we examine the ways in which municipalities perceive their work to be governed by state-level rules and recommendations, to what extent they can shape the content of their work, and whether as well as how the municipalities make use of and handle their autonomy in practice. How is cooperation experienced at different levels?

The report is organised as follows. First, previous Swedish and international research in the field of integration is presented so as to offer the reader a broader perspective and to show the complexity of the topic. Thereafter, research on the challenges to integration policy at the municipal level in Sweden will be brought to light. A description of the methods used in this study follows next, including descriptions of the approach we used and how we worked with the material. Thereafter the analysis and the results of the empirical material are presented. The last section offers a summary and discussion of the results.

BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

DEFINING INTEGRATION

Since the 1990s, the question of integration has been high on the political agenda and has been dealt with in a vast amount of research. While integration is discussed frequently, *integration* is a much-debated concept. What we actually mean when speaking of the term integration is strikingly fuzzy, as is the question of how we should measure the extent to which integration is working (Castels, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec 2001). In political debate, integration is often described as a one-way process, where the new arrivals are expected to integrate themselves into a homogeneous majority society and not least into the labour market. Research however offers a more complex view, where integration is perceived as a mutual and multi-dimensional process that starts when somebody arrives in the receiving country and thereafter requires initiatives both from the newly arrived immigrant and from the population in the receiving country. Multidimensional definitions of integration also distinguish between cultural and social integration, political integration, integration in the labour market and in terms of housing (Joppke 2017).

According to Ager and Strang (2008), social connection, mutual cultural and linguistic competence as well as safety and security are all crucial for integration to be successful. They regard these factors as important components that bind together fundamental rights with different markers for integration, such as employment, housing, education and health. On the whole, there is a dominant perception within research that integration is a process that has to do with immigrated individuals' and groups' gradually increasing participation in the receiving society's institutions and social structures.

WHEN IS AN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATED IN SOCIETY?

Examining and measuring the integration of immigrants entails several analytical challenges. Is integration a process that is limited in time, or a life-long process? Does the same integration process apply to different groups of immigrants from different countries of origin, of different gender and age? Much previous research on integration has focused on examining what types of integration policy measures lead to a quick and successful integration of immigrants within

different spheres of social life. How well integration works is most of the time measured with the help of statistics on the labour market, housing situation, democracy and differences in income between native-born and foreign-born populations.⁴ Indicators of the integration of immigrants can contribute to an understanding of the process of integration by allowing for the measurement of trends and developments on the labour market, immigrants' feelings of belonging as well as attitudes towards immigration and immigrants within the population. Indicators can also be helpful for assessing the effects of integration policy measures. It is however important to point out that the preparation of relevant indicators that cover all aspects of integration within different areas is a complex task. This is especially true when conducting comparative research on different countries where there are different definitions of immigrants and integration as well as different kinds of statistics. Furthermore, statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of the immigrated individual's personal processes of integration. To be able to increase our understanding of the different obstacles and opportunities faced in the process of integration, one also has to study subjective aspects of integration by examining immigrants' own expectations, individual strategies for managing the new institutional landscape as well as interaction with majority society (Bucken-Knapp, Omanovic and Spehar 2019).

Studying immigrants' own perceptions of how integration works and of their own achievements in integration may be just as relevant as studying objective expressions of the actual process of integration, namely statistics. Subjective integration is a dimension of the process of integration that includes immigrants' own ideas of their integration, their feelings of identity and belonging in the new country, and their perceptions of opportunities and obstacles to integration. Individual images of one's own integration are one way of approaching an assessment of how well integration is working in the receiving society. For example, by analysing subjective integration, one gets a measurement from the perspective of the individual on how far they have come in their endeavour to achieve a satisfactory level of participation in the new society.

Earlier studies have shown that immigrants aspire to a 'normalisation' of everyday life. This is connected to a hope of regaining stability and predictability in social and economic life. At the same time, they desire to recover their social identities, for example their professional identity, that they had in their earlier lives (Povrzanovic Frykman 2012; Bennich-Björkman, Kostic and Likic-Brboric 2016; Bucken-Knapp, Fakih and Spehar 2018; Bucken-Knapp, Omanovic and Spehar 2019). In the book *Institutions and Organizations of Refugee Integration: Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Syrian Refugees in Sweden*, the authors examine how refugees from Bosnia and Syria experienced their respective processes of integration in Sweden. Despite the differences regarding integration policy context and structural conditions between the early 1990s and the late 2010s, the authors found interesting overall similarities in terms of how refugees from Bosnia and Syria viewed their opportunities to create a new and rewarding

4 For the purpose of promoting opportunities to develop work on integration within the municipalities, counties and regions, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, SKL) has compiled a set of key figures on integration. In the form of these key figures, a collection of statistics on integration is offered which can support local follow-up and development work (SKL 2017 *Nyckeltal i fokus användarguide*).

existence in Sweden. One shared experience that came to light in the study was that the discrepancy between individual aspirations on the one hand and institutional and structural obstacles on the other made integration more difficult. In general, the integration policy systems were regarded as insufficiently ‘fast’ and ‘accommodating’ (e.g. language teaching and the validation of education/vocational skills). In a study from 2018, Björkman and Spehar examined how newly arrived immigrants experienced reception and integration in the City of Gothenburg 2015–2017 (Björkman-Franke and Spehar 2018). The study shows that the experiences of the processes of reception and integration differ between different individuals of different backgrounds, mainly in relation to the level of education, gender and age. The biggest challenge hence lies in creating institutions for the reception and integration of new arrivals that attend to every individual’s needs and that to a larger extent are adapted to everyone’s individual conditions.

INTEGRATION POLICY CHALLENGES

Most European countries can be described as more or less multicultural in the sense that their citizens have several different cultural backgrounds with regards to for example language, religion and ethnicity. Contemporary multicultural European societies are at the same time to a large extent characterised by segregation and social marginalisation, which is especially visible in big European cities (Marcinićzak, Musterd, van Ham and Tammaru 2016). If integration policy aims to equalise the differences between different individuals’ rights, opportunities and obligations regardless of ethnic and cultural background, we can conclude that integration policy measures in different European countries thus far have not been sufficiently effective. This is also true for Sweden, a country that is considered to be world-leading in work on integration.⁵ The status of immigrants in European countries is increasingly characterised by inequalities in different spheres of social life. A long line of scientific reports and public inquiries in recent years have highlighted that immigrants in Europe on the whole have lower welfare. In this group, we can for example find a larger share of people who live in relative poverty, unemployment and poorer health (OECD 2015).⁶ The lower welfare has partly to do with migrants’ position on the European labour market as inferior to the native-born population, but it also has to do with different regulations for native- and foreign-born populations as well as discrimination. For example, on average it takes between six and ten years for newly arrived immigrants to succeed in establishing themselves on the Swedish labour market (Aldén and Hammarstedt 2014; Joyce 2015).

5 See <http://www.mipex.eu/>

6 When discussing and comparing integration policy measures and outcomes in different countries, it is important that one takes some complex aspects into consideration. Firstly, the comparison of integration policy measures can be problematic because different countries have different conditions regarding migration, labour market, welfare policy and so on. Secondly, it may be important to regard the integration of newly arrived immigrants as a process and not as a state. It takes different amounts of time for different groups of immigrants to become integrated in the new society. There are significant differences between immigrants with different levels of education, origin, and immigration status, between different age groups as well as between men and women (Aldén and Hammarstedt 2014).

Here are some of the factors that research highlights as explanations for the poorer labour market situation for refugees and their families: weak human capital (the individual's education, vocational experience, language skills), absence of formal and informal networks, recruiting employers' standards for considering a person employable, discrimination, and ineffective measures in society to support immigrants' establishment on the labour market (Joyce 2015). Growing inequality in society may lead to many negative consequences for social development. If large groups of people live under completely different conditions than the majority in a country, there is a significant risk for the emergence of second-class citizenship. When hopelessness and feelings of injustice spread, it also increases the risk of radicalisation, not least among youth. We have seen examples of this in so-called suburban riots in several larger European cities.

FROM A RIGHTS-BASED TO AN OBLIGATION-BASED POLICY

Just as in Sweden, debates on integration policy in different European countries are characterised by the perception that the integration of newly arrived immigrants has failed. To support this perception, politicians refer to large segregated urban areas, lack of integration in the labour market, alleged crime, poor school results and so on. There is also talk about the failure of multiculturalism and the need for stricter demands on adaptation for the newly arrived. When we look at actual policy changes, we can see a clear development in different European countries' immigration and integration policies moving away from multiculturalism towards a more or less pronounced ideal of assimilation. A large number of laws have been amended with the purpose of imposing stricter demands on the adaptation of immigrants. The requirements for receiving a residence permit and/or citizenship have been made more restrictive, the regulations for family reunifications have become stricter, the veil has been prohibited in schools and full veils have been prohibited in public places. This integration policy trend has come to be described as 'civic integration' in the literature (Joppke 2017). The trend reflects a renewed state interest in actively strengthening and defending one's own national identity through measures that are aimed at newly arrived immigrants. This can also be found in the form of requirements that demand that they reach certain goals in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes that characterise 'good' citizens.

This development entails a striking shift from a rights-based to an obligation-based notion of how integration is best to be promoted through political governance. Rights were previously seen as a means to achieve integration but have to a large extent come to be seen as a final objective. Integration has succeeded when an individual reaches this goal (Joppke 2017; Goodman 2014). This policy trend builds on the assumption that rights work as an incentive for newly arrived immigrants to reach expected integration results. The trend is also part of a larger development in welfare politics towards an emphasis on activation, returns and individual responsibility. A similar attitude can be discerned in Swedish integration policy developed in relation to the Establishment Reform in 2010 (Breidahl 2017). Yet another defining feature of this policy trend is that integration is connected to the control of migration. The demands on integration also work as a type of control mechanism to keep out potential migrants that are considered difficult to integrate (Bounjour 2014). Policy

measures to speed up integration are hence treated as warranted both as a form of regulating migration and as a way of speeding up integration.

INTEGRATION POLICY CHALLENGES IN MUNICIPAL WORK

Municipalities are often the first point of contact for newly arrived immigrants and migrants, which means that a well-functioning integration policy at the municipal level is of great importance. Municipalities must work to ascertain a well-functioning, long-term integration of new citizens. Otherwise, these new citizens run the risk of ending up outside of society because they do not gain access to the labour market, housing, health care or education (OECD 2018b).

Several activities at the municipal level are affected by the municipality's work with refugee reception and integration. In many cases, this work can be seen as part of the municipality's basic mission that is aimed at all citizens. At the same time, the municipal level has special commitments to the state regarding the reception of new arrivals. In Sweden, municipalities are responsible for the reception of refugees, which includes housing, education in Swedish for immigrants and civic orientation, individual and family matters as well as the reception of unaccompanied children. Integration at the local level is also a matter of granting access to services in a multicultural setting. The increasing diversity of the population often leads to the emergence of densely populated urban areas where the socioeconomic composition puts particular demands on public services. For example, the health care service needs in a densely populated district are different to those in a more ethnically homogeneous one (Niessen and Schibel 2007).

In Sweden, the government is responsible for the formulation of integration policy. Since the implementation of the Establishment Reform (SFS 2010:197) in the year 2010, the overall responsibility for newly arrived immigrants' introduction to society has been centralised and today lies with the Swedish Public Employment Service. This means that newly arrived immigrants who have been granted temporary or permanent residence permits as refugees, persons in need of protection or as relatives to such persons have the opportunity to participate in the Employment Service's establishment programme for a maximum of two years. As part of the establishment programme, an individual plan is designed with the purpose of increasing the new arrival's chances of moving on to studies or employment. Several studies show that many municipalities desire a better dialogue and more cooperation with the Public Employment Service at the local level (Riksrevisionen 2014; SKL 2019). The commission that the Public Employment Service received in 2010 has gone through several changes since the extensive immigration of refugees in 2015. In 2017, a great deal of preparation was underway for the new regulation on establishment efforts for some new arrivals. The regulation came into place on the first of January in 2018. One new element that has entered the framework of the establishment programme is compulsory education for participants who do not have secondary education. This new compulsory education has placed greater focus on cooperation between municipalities and adult education centres, as well as on finding education programmes that match the individual's needs.

COOPERATION – A PRECONDITION FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION?

Cooperation between different professions and organisations within the public sector has become more common in recent decades (Axelsson and Axelsson 2013). Cooperation has also become a bit of a trend in the implementation of integration policy. Different inquiries and reports highlight ‘cooperation’ as a decisive factor in work on making the integration of new arrivals more efficient (Alfredsson 2017; OECD 2018; SKL 2019). According to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), ‘good cooperation between different actors with mandates and commitments in the reception and establishment of asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants...[is] important for a successful integration’ (SKL 2019). This focus on cooperation is not surprising, considering that integration is a cross-sectoral political field. Few questions cut across different sectors of society in the way that integration policy does. Integration policy affects all levels, from the individual to the neighbourhood, school, from the municipality to the state, and all sectors – labour market, business, social services, education, housing, the legal system, culture and so on.

Integration policy is centralised with regards to both organisation and regulation. But, as we have pointed out previously, the scope of centralised control is limited. Successful governance requires the support of both public and private actors at all levels of society. The challenge for politics is to achieve such support. Different initiatives aiming to facilitate the reception, establishment and integration of new arrivals are today run by public, private and non-profit organisations. A number of reports and inquiries have reviewed how governance and cooperation in integration policy work in practice. In several of their reviews, the Swedish National Audit Office (*Riksrevisionen*, the Swedish NAO) has pointed out that both the content of integration policy and the state’s governance of the government agencies are seen as unclear.⁷ Commissioned by Region Västra Götaland’s (VGR) Learning Centre for Migration and Health, SWECO has evaluated the region’s management and coordination of efforts connected to the immigration of refugees during 2015/2016 in the following areas: health care activities, real estate, public transport, the role of civil society as well as collaboration between VGR, civil society and other actors. The evaluation highlights that the way in which cooperation worked during this period was not quite satisfactory. Among other things, it was pointed out that the strategy for cooperation with civil society was not clear enough, which had severe consequences at times. Many non-profit organisations took responsibility for things that government agencies should have been responsible for. This resulted in volunteers in certain situations not having the knowledge that is needed when meeting and supporting people in crisis. It is likely that this affected refugees and volunteers in various ways. Even if there were volunteers with great knowledge about the target group, there were also those who were not up to the task (Cederberg, Charbaf and Rönnqvist 2019). According to the evaluation report, regional cooperation was good in many cases, but cooperation with the Swedish Migration Agency was in many cases seen as problematic. With

7 *Från invandrarpolitik till invandrapolitik* (RiR 2005:5); *Början på något nytt – etableringsförberedande insatser för asylsökande* (RiR 2012:23); *Lärdomar av flyktingsituationen hösten 2015 – beredskap och hantering* (RiR 2017:4).

regards to the Swedish Migration Agency, this mostly concerned the need for information regarding prognoses and the planning of housing establishments.

COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

According to the government, the implementation of integration policy requires measures in many different political areas and from a large number of actors, including civil society. Establishment and integration can be facilitated by the newly arrived immigrants' participation in the activities of civil society. They can thereby find support, networks and personal contacts. The Swedish NAO has reviewed whether the state has succeeded in eliminating obstacles and creating conditions for civil society's participation in government interventions regarding the reception, establishment and integration of new arrivals in the labour market and society at large.⁸ The Swedish NAO's overall assessment is that the ambition to involve civil society in the state's work on integration has not resulted in any corresponding development in the actual work of the government agencies involved. Civil society organisations do not to any larger extent carry out remunerated work within the state integration policy. To a certain degree, the sector has a different, more complementary role. The limited participation of civil society in integration work means that the diversity of activities that according to the parliament and the government can contribute to more effective establishment and integration processes have not been fully achieved. Even if certain measures have been taken to create better conditions for civil society to take on commissions, the Swedish NAO's evaluation shows that there is a need for additional measures to create the desired diversity of activities in the area of integration. To summarise, several different studies show that it is difficult to cooperate within and between organisations in the field of integration.

The County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland is responsible for regional cooperation in migration and integration within the county. Its mission, as stated in regulation (2016:1 363), is to promote regional cooperation between the municipalities, government agencies, businesses and organisations involved in establishment measures. Robust and effective structures to facilitate the reception and establishment of newly arrived immigrants in the county are the overall goal of cooperation.

Cooperation in the area of migration and integration in the County of Västra Götaland is structured into three levels: local, sub-regional and county-wide. Work on the local level is coordinated by the Public Employment Service. The County Administrative Board coordinates the regional and sub-regional levels (with the exception of the region of Gothenburg, where the work is coordinated by the municipal association). The regional consultation group is led by the County Administrative Board. Participating actors are the heads of the Public Employment Service, the Swedish Migration Agency and Region Västra Götaland as well as the county's four municipal associations represented by their directors. Work within the regional consultation groups builds on the exchange of knowledge, the sharing of experiences as well as the monitoring of developments within the field. The consultation group also works on identifying and managing structural problems. It can initiate developmental work

8 *Staten och det civila samhället i integrationsarbetet* (RiR 2014:3).

or draw attention to shared national interests. The focus of the consultation group lies on strategic questions (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019a).

A working group consisting of experts from each organisation is linked to the overall consultation group. Among other things, the working group is responsible for developing and preparing the groundwork for matters to be addressed at the consultation meetings. The group's work can also involve follow-up work after the consultation meetings and participation in in-depth work based on different areas of expertise (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019a).

Because it is the County Administrative Board's mission to promote cooperation in the reception of newly arrived immigrants, it also has a special responsibility for organising the consultation meetings, preparing papers for the meetings and initiating new measures brought about by the discussions. Together with the Swedish Migration Agency and the municipalities, County Administrative Boards also have a shared responsibility for the settlement of new arrivals.⁹ In addition to the actors named thus far, there are also private and non-profit organisations that work with integration, although their responsibilities are not regulated by law. Diedrich and Hellgren (2018) have shown that in Gothenburg alone there are 180 initiatives that aim to help new arrivals to establish themselves on the labour market. A third of those are run by civil society organisations.

9 The Residence Act (*Bosättningslagen*, SFS:2016:38) came to force in March 2016 and means that municipalities are obliged to receive new arrivals who have been granted residence permits (Hemmested 2019). The Residence Act applies to new arrivals who have been granted a residence permit as refugees or others in need of protection in accordance with regulations in the Aliens Act (*Utlänningslagen*, 2005:716) as well as relatives of those persons if they have been granted residence permits and are part of the same household. It currently applies to new arrivals residing within the Swedish Migration Agency's accommodation facilities and quota refugees.

METHODS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

To answer the study's questions, interviews and observations were used. The aim of combining these two methods was to be able to draw more conclusions that complement one another (Denscombe 2016:213). Individual interviews allowed us to examine civil servants' *perceptions* of integration policy challenges in municipal work (Denscombe 2016:267). With interviews we were able to focus on each individual's perspective (Denscombe 2016:267). Observing interactions between municipal civil servants was one way of opening up for a broader spectrum of opinions and perceptions than usually is possible in individual interviews. This contributed to us being able to generate even richer data on the field of integration.

SAMPLE SELECTION AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Interviewees for the study were recruited with the help of the County Administrative Board Västra Götaland. We chose to interview individuals who work with integration-related questions on a daily basis. We divided the respondents into two groups. The first group consisted of a total of five respondents, with one representative each from the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Migration Agency, the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland, Region Västra Götaland (VGR) and the Gothenburg Region (GR). The second group consisted of ten civil servants working with integration issues in different municipalities. The starting point for the selection of respondents in both groups was to interview people who had been working with integration for a long time and who had a good grasp of municipal governing principles and challenges pertaining to the integration of new arrivals. Altogether, we interviewed six people from small municipalities and four from large municipalities. In this study, a small municipality is defined as a municipality with less than 10 000 inhabitants, and a large municipality is one that has more than 10 000 inhabitants (SOU 2007:11, p. 141).

Interviews with a total of 15 respondents were conducted in May 2019. Most interviews were conducted in the form of a personal face-to-face meeting, but some were conducted via phone, so-called computer-assisted interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2014:190). The

time and place of the interviews were agreed upon via email and took the respondents' preferences into consideration. Most interviews were conducted at the civil servants' workplaces in Gothenburg and at the County Administrative Board's premises. The interviews started with informing the respondents about the study, its design, aim and ethical aspects such as confidentiality, anonymity and that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that no specific municipality would be identifiable in the written report. The interviewees' consent to participate in the study was recorded on a mobile phone. All interviews followed an interview guide prepared beforehand, building on previous research. Among other things, respondents were asked to define concepts such as *integration* and *long-term integration*. They were also asked about their perception of when an immigrant is integrated in society. The study participants were also asked to reflect upon municipal challenges in the integration of immigrants into Swedish society and the influence of state government on integration work. They were also asked about how well cooperation worked between different organisations and within the municipalities and what they considered to be factors for success in the municipalities' internal and external cooperation with regards to the integration of immigrants.

Each interview was recorded and later transcribed verbatim to facilitate the analysis. Anonymisation of respondents was achieved by assigning numbers. Anything that may have revealed a respondent's identity has been removed from the quotes that are presented in this report. The transcribed material was analysed and subsequently categorised for the purpose of identifying similarities, differences and overarching themes. The first step in the process of analysis was to gain an understanding and an overall image of the material collected. In the next step, the authors thoroughly read every interview so as to identify new patterns and themes and to sort and categorise data. Then the authors read all quotes within each area of content, such as for instance the views on *integration*, *successful/failed integration*, *long-term integration* and *cooperation*. Based on the question areas in the interview guide, recurring answers were identified. These were analysed in the next step against the backdrop of previous research.

OBSERVATIONS

The interviews were complemented by observations during two dialogue days that were organised by the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland. All participants were informed of the presence of the report's authors and about the aim of the study, once in the invitation to the dialogue days and once more at the beginning of the meetings (Lalander 2015:99). The aim of the dialogue days was to collect positive experiences in the reception of new arrivals in the County of Västra Götaland and to identify factors for success in the sustainable long-term reception of new arrivals, despite changes to the number of persons received. The dialogue days built on two questions: How can municipalities maintain their readiness and capacity to receive new arrivals under changing conditions? And: How do we ensure that municipalities and other actors' knowledge and experiences of receiving new arrivals are taken account of in future work?

The dialogue days ‘Municipalities’ experiences of establishment and integration in the County of Västra Götaland between the years 2015 and 2018. What has worked well, and which knowledge should we build on further?’ took place at the premises of the County Administrative Board in Gothenburg on 8 May 2019 and in Vara on 10 May 2019. A total of 29 representatives from the county’s 49 municipalities participated at the dialogue days.¹⁰

¹⁰ Participants from 29 of the county’s 49 municipalities took part in the dialogue days. Participants came from the municipalities of Alingsås, Bengtsfors, Bollebygd, Borås, Essunga, Grästorps, Gullspång, Göteborg, Herrljunga, Hjo, Kungälv, Lerum, Lidköping, Mariestad, Skara, Skövde, Sotenäs, Strömstad, Svenljunga, Tibro, Tidaholm, Tjörn, Tranemo, Töreboda, Uddevalla, Vara, Vårgårda, Vänersborg and Åmål.

RESULTS

INTEGRATION – AN UNCLEAR CONCEPT

Previous research has illustrated that *integration* is a concept that can be interpreted and used in different ways. For the purpose of forming an image of how civil servants perceive of the concept, respondents were asked to reflect on a number of different concepts, such as *integration*, *sustainable/long-term integration* and *successful* as well as *less successful integration*. Furthermore, respondents were asked to reflect upon when an immigrant should be considered integrated in society. The figure below summarises the perceptions with regards to integration that recurred the most in the interviews.

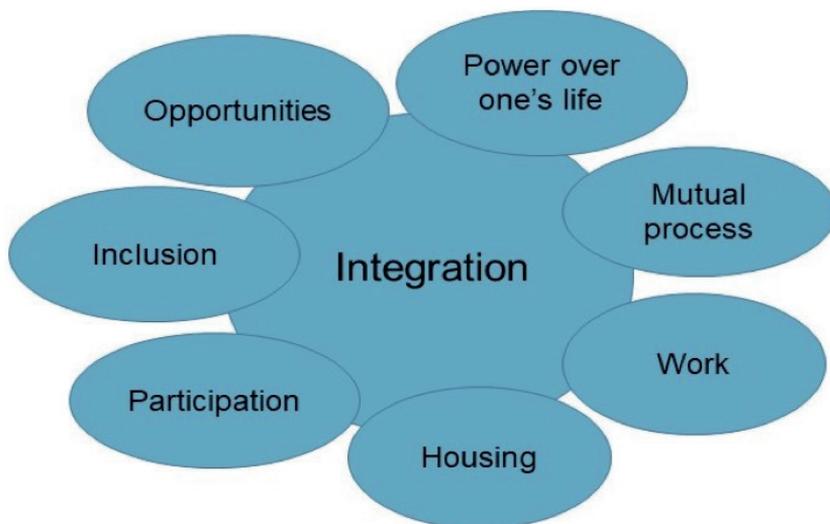


Figure 1: Words that define and are associated with integration

Previous research emphasises that what integration means and how it is to be measured are strikingly fuzzy matters (Castels, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec 2001). Some respondents in this study pointed out that they thought *integration* perhaps was not the most suitable term to

use when speaking about immigrants. The term *inclusion* was considered to be better than *integration*:

I actually do not like the word integration; I prefer inclusion because I think that that is what it is about. They are people who come here and we have to have more acceptance, because we are talking about similarities. Integration, that might as well be a physical data file that is to be integrated with something else. I understand that people speak of integration, but I think inclusion in terms of values is a better term to use (Respondent 7).

There is a word that is better suited than integration. But there is no point in getting caught up in words too much, but surely inclusion would be a better word. And what's important, [it's] a process that goes both ways or in all directions, where focus lies on partnership and that one is on the same level with the target group (Respondent 14).

Integration as a concept can also be perceived as exclusionary, one of the respondents pointed out:

For me it's [integration], that you understand the new society, how it works, how you can act and keep working according to the system that is there. But that you can preserve the person you are, your culture and customs, as long as they do not conflict with Swedish laws. When you tell someone that they are not integrated, you are also saying that they do not fit the mould that we have in this country. So, the very question of integration is actually a little problematic when we use it, because at first thought we exclude another person, we do not include [them] (Respondent 15).

In addition to inclusion and understanding the new society, some emphasised that integration also means participating and having power over one's life:

For me, integration is about participation, gaining a sense of a connection, that you are in, that you feel part of society, that you contribute to, that you develop society (Respondent 12).

Integration is when people have power over their lives, by having a good school, a good path to financial self-sufficiency. So that you can have your own income and in that way are part of society (...) (Respondent 10).

On the whole, there is a dominant perception within research that integration is a process that has to do with immigrated individuals' and groups' gradually increasing participation in the receiving society's institutions and social structures. According to this multidimensional perception, integration is a mutual process. This line of reasoning could also be found among our respondents:

I would define integration as some form of mutual process between two parts with the purpose of finding a form of common ground, that is manageable (...)
(Respondent 8).

Sustainable and long-term solutions are discussed in a range of different political fields today. According to our respondents, sustainability and long-sightedness within integration are about a belief in the individual and about quickly making use of the experiences that the new arrivals bring with them:

It's about, that you think that here, these persons who come here, they are people who were forced to leave their country, they have a bunch of experience, and we are incredibly terrible at making use of it. How can we take stock quickly, what is needed, what qualifications do we need, how do we tie this together (...)
(Respondent 7).

For most respondents, long-term and sustainable integration also meant that newly arrived immigrants should find work, internships, opportunities to participate in society and contribute to societal development:

If it is to be for the long-term, people who come to Sweden need to be a part of society, have a job, that you know, that society is accessible for me who is newly arrived, based on my needs. And that society makes itself accessible by making sure that newly arrived immigrants also can make use of opportunities, rights and obligations in the country that they come to (Respondent 10).

Yet another aspect that emerged in the interviews is that sustainable integration also entails the acceptance of difference. We need to create a society where everyone can live in harmony with one another's differences:

It's a society where different groups with different backgrounds and cultures live together. A society that can handle diversity then (Respondent 4).

One respondent emphasised that in contemporary Sweden, there is no definition of or plan for sustainable integration:

Sustainable means that there should be a system where we work with integration and everyone knows how to do it. Because it is sustainable if you have a system that you always can fall back on. Today it doesn't quite feel like we have a clear system, one that says that this is how we should work with integration in Sweden. So, the question of integration in particular, if it is sustainable right now, no it is not, because there is no basis, there is no basis that says that, this is how we do it in Sweden (Respondent 15).

The respondents were also asked to define how they perceive of successful and less successful integration, respectively. The interviewees described successful integration in about the same way as they described integration. For many of them, successful integration means that the individual who is to be integrated has work and housing, feels part of and included in society, and has the same opportunities as everyone else in society:

Successful integration of an individual, when speaking from the perspective of the individual, that's when the person feels like a part of society and in practical terms, in terms of the person having a job, having a place to live, having some form of social context that feels meaningful (Respondent 8).

Most respondents associate less successful integration with crime, suburbs and marginalised areas:

A less successful integration is that you end up marginalised, in an environment where, that is inconsistent with the other parts of society and that kind of creates its own rules (...) (Respondent 3).

THE ROLE OF NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

One question that has received a lot of attention in research is that of how one is to measure integration. Most of the time, how well integration works is measured with the help of statistics on a number of 'indicators', for example with regards to the labour market, housing situation, education, political participation and differences in income. These indicators can also be found in the respondents' answers. Most think that an individual is integrated when they have work and when they participate in society:

I suppose it is important that you yourself feel, that you are part of society and that's often it after all, that you are part of a context, have a job to go to, that you have employment, that you are part of different groupings (...) (Respondent 14).

Previous research also poses the question of whether integration is a process that is limited in time or lasts one's whole life. In this study, respondents were asked about when they consider a person to be integrated in society. This led some of them to reflect upon how many years it could or should take for an individual to become integrated in society:

I would say that, just about three years. And then I don't think that it's when you've got a job that you're integrated, but that you understand Swedish society (Respondent 11).

I suppose I think that, before you feel, that you have the power, to actually be able to influence your own life and that you also have the opportunity to participate in the development of society on equal terms. That varies and it takes time. Let's say that language e.g. is an important part of integration, then that takes more time than these two years. Today it seems as though it takes 7–9 years. But we're hopeful that after all, that we can speed up this process (...) (Respondent 2).

One of the respondents thought that it was not possible to define when a person is integrated in society:

It's not possible to define when an immigrant is integrated in society. Because what does it mean to be integrated? Is it that I have started to drink coffee every morning like everyone else? That I need to have lunch every day? Because in some cultures you work and you don't have lunch, you work during your lunchtime. Do I have to have lunch, do I have to have coffee for 30 minutes every morning with everyone else? Is that what's integrated? There is no definition for when you are Swedish, because there are Swedes who don't act according to Swedish norms either (Respondent 15).

The respondents furthermore were asked to reflect on the extent to which municipalities should support an individual in their integration. Most agreed that this was very much an individual matter. Consideration should be taken of the individual's background, life experience and level of education. Based on the individual's own unique strengths and abilities, one should offer them the support that they need to succeed in becoming part of society. There should be a balance in the amount of support offered:

Enough, but not too much. I think there must be a focus, that the new arrivals can make use of their own resources, their own opportunities, and, one must never forget, obligations. And it's this thing with being expected to contribute and find work and become a part of this society. It has to be enough help, that you can manage to take this step (...) (Respondent 10).

Some respondents thought that municipalities should support the newly arrived as much as possible in their integration. According to them, the odds of integrating successfully would increase the more support each individual receives:

I hold that municipalities should support new inhabitants or those who come incredibly much. Some you perhaps need to support less, but some you have to support significantly more. The more you support and partake from the side of the municipality, the higher the odds are that you succeed in integrating. And then also contribute to them maybe becoming taxpayers in the future (Respondent 12).

Respondents also reflected upon what individuals themselves can do to integrate into society:

Well, the individual has to, or needs to do an incredible lot. First of all, there needs to be an interest and a will. If you don't have that, you'll have poorer conditions to succeed (...) Then of course, that you need to learn the language. The language is incredibly important after all. But we have several examples, where they speak very, very poor Swedish, but have amazing skills in a particular vocation, they have an incredible will to show it and it has worked out well for those individuals. So that, we know that the language is the most important, but if you don't have the will to enter into working life or learn something new, then it will be difficult (Respondent 12).

LACK OF ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND PROJECTIFICATION

The respondents were also asked to describe the biggest challenges in working with the establishment and integration of new arrivals. One challenge that the respondents reflected on pertained to the municipalities' finances. Saving requirements and cutbacks within different areas give rise to concerns and uncertainty with regards to future work with integration:

Many municipalities today are facing extensive saving requirements and many municipalities push themselves to the edge so to speak. The financial situation today influences what ventures you can pursue. The Public Employment Service, which is our main partner, is cutting back on a lot of its activities. That affects us in our daily work on keeping up the activities we have chosen to work with (...) I find that resources have decreased and I am worried about this because I think that work on integration should be carried out the most right now (Respondent 12).

Yet another challenge that several respondents highlighted pertains to the so-called 'projectification' of integration policy, which many find to present an obstacle to long-sightedness in integration work. The existence of different local projects and initiatives is considered to create poor conditions for sustainable integration in the long term, because the projects most of the time are short-term and dependent on external funding that is limited in time:

I think it is a problem that there are quite a lot of small, local initiatives or projects on integration. The funding lasts for maybe 2–3 years, then there is no more funding. Perhaps it was successful, but when funding disappears, key figures also disappear. Maybe you lose that knowledge. Somewhere else it may be started again, from scratch, and it doesn't quite feel as though it's sustainable, working like this. Instead, what we need is to work in the long-term, have larger ventures and include them in permanent programmes (Respondent 15).

NATIONAL GOVERNANCE OR MUNICIPAL SELF-DETERMINATION

The respondents were asked to reflect on the balance between national governance and municipal self-determination. Some respondents wished for more national governance in questions of integration, while others would like the municipalities to have more room to manoeuvre on their own. The latter find that municipal self-determination is necessary to be able to succeed with integration at the local level. With greater freedom to decide on certain questions, the municipalities would be able to influence the new arrivals' processes of integration to a greater extent.

It's a little bit of both. Sometimes you can feel that you want to cry out for more national governance, sometimes it's almost the opposite. Sometimes you wish you had, I'm not saying that it was better before, but municipalities used to have a little more room to act when it comes to integration, before the Establishment Reform. You had the opportunity, you could set up solutions that are right for the

individual and I think, it would also be very good, to be able to identify more quickly and maybe quickly find solutions locally, so that you can get to the process of integration, so that people don't become pacified either (Respondent 6).

Another respondent made the point of how difficult it was for the state to govern in a way that takes the municipalities' different circumstances into account:

I think that national governance is worrying because municipalities have very different circumstances. We have small municipalities with small resources, but maybe with easier access to businesses. Then there are large municipalities, that have large resources, but where there are gaps between different units. In the small municipalities, there is very little money and little opportunity for flexible solutions. And I find that worrisome because then it becomes a very uneven integration (Respondent 1).

Respondents were asked about their opinions on the Residence Act and the Establishment Reform. Respondents had very different views on how these acts affected work with integration at the municipal level. Some respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the Residence Act:

The Residence Act is good, I think. Because when you have the opportunity to decide at the state level where newly arrived immigrants are to be placed, where they are to live, then it is very important to be able to distribute fairly in the whole country, to be able to have a better integration process. We know today that it is easier to learn the language when you have a Swedish neighbour who wants to talk to you (...) (Respondent 15).

Several respondents were however critical of the so-called EBO-Act (*Lagen om eget boende*), which means that an asylum seeker can choose to find their own place to live. The problem is that the idea is to place asylum seekers so that they are spread out in a certain way, but because they can choose their own place to live, which many of them do, this leads to many asylum seekers being clustered in the same places. That makes it difficult to fight segregation, as the respondents pointed out. In addition, the respondents emphasised that this process of settlement does not give the municipalities enough time to prepare for the reception of those who are allocated there in a good way:

I understand the reasoning behind the Residence Act, because some municipalities got away and now they want a more even distribution, but as long as the EBO-Act is in place, which allows people to move as they please, it is problematic. Those who live in their own places are integrated into a group that is segregated. I wouldn't like to say that that is a path to poverty, but it does strengthen segregation (Respondent 7).

Let's take the process surrounding the Residence Act, if we are to talk about the municipality's planning conditions. The government decides on a number for the whole country in August perhaps, then it gets to the County Administrative

Board, maybe it is decided a little earlier, then they have to work with a large county and provide conditions for deciding on a number for the county, and the number for the municipality is decided upon maybe in October. That leaves us with two months to prepare for the next year and then we don't know if it is going to be X [amount] or X [amount]. That is not enough time, we would have liked to be able to have a number in May so that we can prepare, how we should think about the next year, which accommodations we need to keep, and which ones we can phase out (Respondent 7).

Another law that the respondents could address was the Establishment Reform. Several respondents reflected upon the role of the Public Employment Agency:

The Establishment Reform is good I think, but I don't think that the Public Employment Agency is living up to it. It's like it's not individualised enough, it doesn't offer enough resources to give the individual the best conditions (Respondent 11).

I think that the Public Employment Agency should do what it is supposed to do, and I don't think they are doing that, they are only working with some of the things. They are not always working quite professionally and it's about finding a good way to cooperate (...) (Respondent 7).

COOPERATION – WHEN IT IS NEEDED

The respondents were also asked how well cooperation was working between different organisations and units within the municipalities, and what they considered to be factors for success in the municipality's internal and external cooperation with regards to integration. The respondents' answers indicate that there are challenges, but also good examples of working well together with the aim of developing strategies and creating conditions that allow new arrivals to establish themselves in society as quickly as possible:

I think that we work quite well together within the municipality, actually, on the whole, we have worked quite a lot on improving this. When it comes to agencies, government agencies, then I think that we also have a good cooperation with the Public Employment Service. We have had the opportunity to build it over several years and it has improved (...) (Respondent 6).

I would say that it is very good. Much better than at the government level to be honest. Cooperation between government agencies, including the Public Employment Service, also the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Migration Agency, work much better at the municipal level, the local level, than what I perceive it to be like at the state level. If I was to add non-profit organisations, which are incredibly important for integration, then I think that cooperation is working really well (Respondent 12).

It becomes very clear in the interviews that cooperation with other actors, especially with neighbouring municipalities, is essential for small municipalities to be able to run certain projects or offer programmes to everyone on equal terms. The respondents are asking for more cooperation across municipal borders in matters concerning the labour market, the exchange of knowledge and experiences, shared learning and development:

(...) But on the whole, it feels like, that we have come to understand that we are way too small to not work together. I think we have worked really well together and that we have business developers who are very driven and very good at working together with the municipality's other parts. Right now, we are in high spirits when it comes to working together and we think that we will not be able to solve the issues of integration or the provision of skilled employees for companies if we do not work together. So, we are well on our way and we have to work towards the same goals (...) (Respondent 2).

I think that cooperation between neighbouring municipalities could be better, especially neighbouring municipalities in rural areas or the countryside. There, resources are often lacking, as are opportunities to run certain programmes on their own. There is a risk that if you cut back certain programmes at the state or municipal level, cooperation will suffer. Cooperation has to be kept up and protected. Everything can improve (Respondent 12).

Respondents were also given the chance to talk about what defines good cooperation and what it takes to achieve it in the field of integration. Most agree that good cooperation is about the exchange of experiences and knowledge. This includes having the ability to work together in a team that crosses the boundaries of different government agencies and municipalities, and to develop shared goals and strategies:

You need to have a common goal that you want to reach together. Then of course you can have a network that is about exchanging knowledge and experiences. From that, you can find things that you need to do together (Respondent 4).

It's about helping one another. If somebody has invented something, you can share it with others. It's about maybe just sharing experiences, it's about almost kind of coming to agreements on how we work (Respondent 7).

Exchange of information and a sort of bank of ideas, what has worked and what has not worked. I also think that it is important that cooperation is supported and initiated within the municipality's board to get the issue mandated. It is important to discuss what we mean by cooperation and what needs to be done to arrive at a shared approach (Respondent 11).

The respondents pointed out however that it is important to be critical and not to regard cooperation as the solution to all challenges. For this reason, it is important in any given situation to always ask the question of whether cooperation really is necessary:

It is necessary to work together, but sometimes I can think that, if everyone has clear tasks and completes those tasks, then I think that cooperation does not need to be the most important. We work quite a lot and talk about working together, but as far as I can see, we think that we are going to solve things just because we work together. If I'm going to be a little mean, sometimes we use cooperation to get out of doing something that we maybe should have done ourselves (Respondent 6).

We could be a little more to the point when it comes to cooperation. Cooperating for the sake of cooperation, we need to get away from that. We need to be clearer on why we are to cooperate on these questions and we also have to start cooperating with a more individualised focus. And not as though all who come to Sweden are to be put in the same boat or bowl. We need to look at cooperation more individually from here on forward (Respondent 1).

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR LONG-TERM AND SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION?

Respondents were asked what needs to be done for Sweden and the country's municipalities to succeed with integration. One of the respondents suggested that there is a need for unanimous agreement on the question of integration among politicians at all levels:

I think that our politicians at the state and municipal levels need to come to an agreement on long-term policy in this area (...) You need to have a long-term policy, that you agree upon and work towards and not speak badly of people from other countries who live in Sweden (...) (Respondent 10).

To reach success in integration, it is necessary to combat the existing housing shortage, segregation and polarisation in society. Polarisation takes its shape in a resistance towards certain programmes offered to new arrivals. Some respondents pointed out that it is incredibly important to change the view of immigration that can be found in society today. Positive aspects that speak in favour of immigration and that in various ways show how new arrivals enrich Sweden need to be given more space in the public debate:

(...) one big challenge for integration I think is polarisation in society. That there is no resistance towards integration, but a big resistance towards different programmes that are needed for integration. For example, there is resistance to distributing different resources to this group (...) If we have like twenty percent who are convinced that all social problems are due to the fact that we have received refugees, then that is a giant problem, regardless of whether it is true or not, I'm not judging (Respondent 8).

The respondents argued that the complexity of the question of integration requires more than just efforts at the municipal level. To succeed with integration, it is important that different political fields interact with one another and that actors such as municipalities, government

agencies, the industry, civil society and other organisations that are involved in work on integration cooperate and take on a shared responsibility.

(...) I don't think that it is enough with just local efforts, more is needed. The problematic issue of integration, if that is how one should put it, has become very big and it stretches across very many political fields, so it's not enough to just kind of have a good education programme for Swedish for immigrants and some municipality that is committed, but you have to look at it from the perspective of housing policy, criminal policy and public health (...) (Respondent 5).

We need to spread the word that integration is everyone's responsibility. All employers, all associations. Regardless of what you think about immigrants and integration policy, everyone has to work to succeed with integration and create a sense of community in Swedish municipalities (...) To prevent segregation and marginalisation and everything bad that can come with it (Respondent 2).

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DIALOGUE DAYS

During the dialogue days that the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland organised, representatives from several municipalities shared their experiences of working with the reception of newly arrived immigrants in the County of Västra Götaland. One of the aims of the meeting was to identify factors for success for sustainable long-term integration. In another report, the County Administrative Board has put together the factors for success that the participants of the dialogue days regarded as key to achieving successful, sustainable integration (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019). The factors that were highlighted during the dialogue days correspond to the ones that were mentioned in the interviews. For municipalities to succeed with long-term integration, there first of all need to be clear political guidelines and strategies in place, detailing how this is to be achieved. Another key factor, according to the participants at the dialogue days, is also to approach the issue of integration as a natural part of municipal work in a globalised world, not just a temporary problem. Furthermore, the municipalities call for a clear division of responsibilities in efforts towards integration, among other things to be able to start working with appropriate programmes at the right time. Cooperation within and between municipalities as well as cooperation with civil society, government agencies and other actors are also important factors in succeeding with integration.

Knowledge is also needed within the organisations. This requires efforts such as maintaining the competencies that the municipalities have gathered since 2015, monitoring developments in the fields of migration and integration, and interacting with other actors. It was also stressed that integration efforts should be designed to meet the specific needs of each individual. One key to success is to identify the individual's needs early on and find a way of meeting those needs. For example, alternative solutions for individuals with little education were called for, as were special programmes for immigrant women who are very far from the labour market. Finally, it is important to regard new arrivals as a resource and to promote a positive image of immigration and integration, an image that leads people to understand that everyone needs to learn to live together with differences in a multicultural society (County Administrative Board Västra Götaland 2019).

Another aim of the dialogue days was to reflect upon the following questions: How can municipalities maintain their readiness and capacity to receive new arrivals under changing

conditions? And: How do we ensure that municipalities and other actors' knowledge and experience of receiving new arrivals are taken account of in future work? Based on the conversations held at the dialogue days, we can conclude that there was some concern among participants with regards to the cutbacks connected to the decreasing number of new arrivals, the Public Employment Service's reorganisation as well as saving requirements and quick changes to the law. Quite a few participants wondered what would happen if the resources for working with new arrivals were to be reduced. If one does not invest in the new arrivals' continued journey into society after the first period of establishment, there is a risk that they will not succeed in becoming financially self-sufficient. Yet another challenge lies in the fact that among the new arrivals who have come to Sweden in recent years, there is a significant group of low-skilled people who require additional support. The changes to the organisation of the Public Employment Service at the same time make it more difficult for the municipalities to plan and carry out their programmes. A recurring theme in the discussions were reflections on strategies for preventing high staff turnover and maintaining competence, as well as how to be prepared for the next possible 'refugee crisis'. In the dialogue, the importance of one person in the municipality being responsible for monitoring developments in the field of migration and integration was stressed. This person could also be responsible for internal newsletters as well as communication with citizens. In times of change, it is especially important to maintain competencies and institutional memory.

SUMMARISING DISCUSSION

The aim of this report is to contribute with increased knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in municipal work towards long-term and sustainable integration in the County of Västra Götaland. To do so, civil servants' perceptions and experiences of work on integration were studied. During the year of 2015 especially, the immigration of refugees increased, including adults, families and unaccompanied children. At the same time, changes were made to the regulations in immigration and integration policy, which brought about new challenges for the municipalities' work on the reception and integration of new arrivals. A few years on since the so-called refugee crisis, it is especially relevant to collect experiences and assemble knowledge. This is due to the decreasing number of resident permits granted to asylum seekers, ongoing cutbacks in programmes as well as the reorganisation of labour market politics, including the changing role of the Public Employment Service.

The interviews and observations in this study confirm what previous research has highlighted, namely that defining the concept of *integration* is a complex task. According to multiple respondents, there are several other words that are better suited than *integration*, and these include *reciprocity*, *establishment*, *inclusion* and *participation*. Although the policy goals of integration are positive, such as equal inclusion in social life, the concept can also be perceived as negative and exclusionary. It can for instance single out immigrants as culturally and economically problematic. Integration has many sides; it is about work, education, social contexts and language. Long-term integration occurs when an immigrant finds an occupation, is given the opportunity to create an independent existence and can contribute to society. In order to achieve long-term sustainable integration, there is a need for a clear political mission and long-sightedness in the approach towards integration. There is a need for a clear distribution of responsibilities in the work on integration and a well-functioning cooperation between all actors involved. In addition, knowledge is required. We need to maintain competencies, monitor developments in the field and share experiences with others. It is also important to promote a positive image of immigration and integration.

To summarise, the data gathered here sheds light onto the different conditions and complex challenges that municipalities continue to face in their work with integration. On the one hand, municipalities are limited in their actions by state governance, especially due to the lack of clear guidelines. Several respondents pointed out that for example the National

Board of Health and Welfare and the Swedish Migration Agency have different regulations in matters concerning the rights of unaccompanied children. For this reason, it sometimes remains unclear what municipalities are to do in individual cases. On the other hand, municipal self-determination makes it possible to run different kinds of integration programmes for new arrivals at the local level. The study shows that there is a desire in many municipalities to have clearer roles and mandates, and a more distinct prioritisation of work on the establishment of new inhabitants in the municipalities. In order for the reception of newly arrived immigrants in a municipality to receive the space and resources that are required, it is necessary for the issue to be a priority and to be regarded as a part of the municipality's permanent mission. Against the backdrop of ongoing changes in the distribution of responsibilities and roles in the work on the establishment of new arrivals, municipalities need to clarify how they regard their own role, the direction they are taking and the opportunities they have in matters concerning asylum seekers, new arrivals and integration. The reflections of the civil servants who participated in this study indicate that many municipalities today are lacking the political will and a clear vision of how long-term integration is to be achieved.

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