



# Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

## Rural Education and Migration: A Study of the 2015 Reception of Young Refugees in Sweden

**Elisabet Öhrn**

*University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

[elisabet.ohrn@gu.se](mailto:elisabet.ohrn@gu.se)

**Dennis Beach**

*University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

[dennis.beach@ped.gu.se](mailto:dennis.beach@ped.gu.se)

**Monica Johansson**

*University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

[monica.johansson.3@gu.se](mailto:monica.johansson.3@gu.se)

**Maria Rönnlund**

*Umeå University, Sweden*

[maria.ronnlund@umu.se](mailto:maria.ronnlund@umu.se)

**Per-Åke Rosvall**

*Umeå University, Sweden*

[per-ake.rosvall@umu.se](mailto:per-ake.rosvall@umu.se)

### Abstract

In the autumn of 2015 a large number of mainly Syrian refugees arrived in Sweden. They were unevenly distributed geographically by the authorities and smaller municipalities received proportionally larger numbers than others. The schools became central in the local reception processes. They faced difficulties but also possibilities, both pedagogical, organizational and in relation to social issues. Based on participant observation and interviews with staff in six rural schools in different rural areas from an ethnographic study, in this paper we explore experiences about how schools received the new refugees and how reception influenced teaching. The analyses indicate some changes in forms of teaching (e.g. sensitivity to language differences, more explicit structuring of tasks) that became permanent as they were considered beneficial to non-migrant students as well. In contrast, there were very few signs of changes in the content of teaching, which appears to have largely remained largely the same as before the refugees came.

**Keywords:** *refugees, teaching, local conditions, ethnography*

### Introduction

War broke out in Syria in 2011 with a subsequent tidal scale escalation of war born diaspora as families fled the fighting and related atrocities. Many of these families included children. There were also refugee children traveling without their parents, sometimes with another relative or a neighbour, and sometimes unaccompanied. They usually fled to neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, but many also travelled (often under hazardous conditions) to other nations, many on them in Europe, such as Greece, Italy, France, Germany and Sweden (UNHRC,

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.

The number of refugees peaked in 2015, putting enormous pressure on the receiving countries, many of which had different ways of accommodating refugees and including their children in the educational system. Access to infant, primary, secondary and post-secondary education varied across countries, as did decisions as to whether to educate the new students in ordinary classes or separately from others in special reception classes, before integrating them with children from the host-nation's population.

Recipients of the largest numbers of refugees and asylum seekers were Germany followed by Sweden, France and the Russian Federation (Rosvall, 2017). Thus, Sweden was one of the countries in Europe that had the most generous policy for accepting refugees, particularly towards young children and unaccompanied minors. However, the reception posed as a major challenge for the nation, and particularly for municipalities, including many sparsely populated rural areas, that received proportionally larger numbers of refugees than other parts of the country (Skolinspektionen, 2016). The reception put a lot of stress on the local schools, as they were vital for the reception of young refugee's integration and feelings of safety. As pointed out in previous research (e.g., Hek, 2005), schools are central meeting points in young people's everyday lives, and institutions that convey national knowledge and understandings. This also was evident in the Swedish reception, as pointed out by Nilsson and Bunar (2016). It affected many parts of society, but no other institution was given as much responsibility as schools were.

### **Research Background**

Sweden was not the only European country to allocate a significant proportion of the 2015 asylum seekers to rural regions. This was also the case in Germany, a fact said to have furthered an interest for areas that are otherwise typically less focused on in migrant research than urban ones (Glorius et al., 2021). However, research on rural migrants and especially on the mere reception and how it varies with different conditions in rural areas is sparse (ibid).

One significant feature for the reception and education of the new refugees relates to what kind of schools they are arriving to and what kind of curriculum they offer (Crul et al., 2019). Our previous analyses point to rural school curriculum packaging in some cases relating more openly and distinctly to the local context than in others (Öhrn & Beach, 2019). There were differences between settings, with local contextualising in teaching appearing especially in sparsely populated areas, which showed a greater representation and appreciation of the local place in classroom interactions, school interior displays and teaching content. Also, there was a voiced appreciation among young people of social cohesion in their place typically phrased as the advantages of 'Everyone knows everyone'. This condition generally appeared in the descriptions from the ethnographic cases to form a foundation for solidarity and social cohesion among locals. It is important however not to overgeneralise or overemphasise these points (Beach & Öhrn, 2021). The features of strong localism appear only in some cases and never at the expense of teaching official knowledge and national values through the formal curriculum.

Rural integration can be considered in relation to what Shucksmith et al. (2009) argue to be a conceptual dichotomy in rural research, between what they term pastoralism (representing rural idylls to be cherished by stressing discourses of everyone knows everyone and close relations between individuals) and pre-modernism (emphasising constraints and resistance to change in rural life). Also discussed by for instance Halfacree (1995), Leyshon (2008) and Rye (2006), pastoralism derives from concepts of the organisation of common grazing-land. Shucksmith's definition however highlights the organisation of community when respecting an open common access natural assets and a 'community spirit'. This kind of spirit might further the reception and inclusion of new community members (Johansson, 2019) and a less ethnically residential segregation compared to urban areas (Forsberg et al., 2012). But it might also be that the lack of shared history with new arrivers and their lack of localised capital (Corbett, 2007; Moilanen, 2012)

may pose as a hindrance to reception and inclusion when there is a strong element of local cultural conservatism.

The conceptual dichotomy identified by Shucksmith et al. (2009) and discussed also by others such as Halfacree (1995) and Leyshon (2008), is interesting in relation to how rural areas during the refugee wave were affected both by EU and national legislation, not the least when people experienced themselves to be on the receiving-end of European and national policies beyond their control, and that lacked understanding of rural conditions (Rosvall et al., 2022). The experience of being on the receiving end might encourage or support negative views of migrant placements. However, municipalities with small educational institutions also have more inter- and intraprofessional exchanges (Rosvall, 2022), so effects might be positive in intimate pastoral spaces where closeness between institutions and individuals could tighten local solidarity further and aid two-way cultural adaptations. Taylor and Kaur Sidhu (2012) point to how the worldwide rise in numbers of refugees and asylum seekers requires that practices of institutions charged with their resettlement are identified and analysed so schools may be able to make better contributions to successful refugee reception of young and resettlement. They identify barriers to inclusion confronting young refugees and examples of how to develop professional practices to meet their needs through and in models of good practice in educational institutions through inclusive schooling (Arar et al., 2019). Professional leadership for social justice in multicultural contexts plays an important role in orchestrating and promoting sound professional and intra-professional practices and collaboration (García-Carmona et al., 2021; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016; Shields, 2010).

Rural schools and communities obviously have different histories and respond to different conditions. Such differences most probably also have implications for the reception of young migrants generally (Arar et al., 2019; Taylor & Kaur Sidhu, 2012), as well as for the organisation of their education (García-Carmona et al., 2021). Previous Swedish research reports of two main forms of teaching organisation for migrants (with some local variations); separate preparatory classes (in Swedish: *förberedelseklass*), and regular Swedish-speaking ones (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). Regular classes potentially offer a better chance of integration with Swedish-speaking youth, whereas preparatory classes have been said to offer better chances for learning content, but also to risk furthering isolation from other students. Bunar (2017, p. 7) reports of newly arrived students expressing a strong desire to be part of mainstream education and included “in a real class”. He emphasises the need to view these students as equal to others, not as “temporary others” (Bunar 2017, p. 15). In line with this, research should look for and analyse also the positive options or outcome associated with receiving migrant students. This is also our aim with the present article, where we discuss the organisation and implications of the reception of refugees in 2015-2016 by drawing on ethnographic research from six schools in various rural municipalities in Sweden using the following research questions:

- How was teaching organised for refugee students and on what grounds?
- Did forms and content of teaching change with/after the reception of refugees?
- What posed as central challenges and resources with the reception of refugee students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The project is a theoretically informed ethnography (Willis & Trondman, 2000) framed within a materialist theory of culture drawing on Massey’s (1994/2013) ideas about the importance of socio-spatial and material practices, for the historical and contemporary processes of interconnection between different kinds of place and space and the people in them. The theory in this way furthers an interest in the relations between various material and social conditions of a place, and its relations to the outside world, including in our case ways of organising schools and education for the reception of new young refugees. The theory has guided how we have formed our questions and shaped our analyses when we try to understand and develop critical insights

into (and explanations about) the expressions and positions taken by participants in relation to their roles in these processes. Our questions therefore include ones addressing how people try to create professional and intra-professional practices and collaboration in the reception of the new young refugees, and how they try to induct them into majority language, history and culture (Taylor & Kaur Sidhu, 2012). Other international research discussing these matters includes work by Khalifa et al. (2016) and Shields (2010).

## Method

The article draws on research from six schools in different rural areas in Sweden, studied in the four-year project *Education and integration of newly arrived migrants in rural area* (Funded by Swedish Research Council 2019-2022, VR 2018-03970). The schools and municipalities selected for the projects were chosen to represent variations regarding different types of rural setting, including both de/industrial towns, small villages and sparsely populated areas in northern and southern Sweden. They included schools and local populations from mountain and forested areas situated inland or by the sea-, lake- and riverside.

The project was designed to investigate the scope of different reception and teaching strategies and practices in schools and municipalities. It focussed on experiences of various forms of organising teaching, and changes in teaching content during the reception process (including representations of 'us', 'the place' etc), as well as central challenges and resources associated with the reception. The data consists of classroom and school observations, and interviews with school staff (primarily teachers) and municipal employees who handled migration issues. There were in all 45 interviews spread across the six different communities and 41 days of participant observation, mainly from 2019 and 2020. The project also includes a second part, which further explores local experiences of the reception and integration process through interviews with school and community staff in 15 additional rural municipalities, to be presented in forthcoming texts.

We have conducted research in the selected schools previously, in 2015-2016 when the wave of Syrian refugees peaked, with this helping us to contextualise the current analysis in relation to how the schools adopted different strategies toward the new arrivals. Even the previous project, *Rural youth – education, place and participation* (funded by the Swedish Research Council 2014-2018, VR 2013-2142), was an ethnography with classroom observations, field conversations and formal interviews with students and staff at the schools, supplemented with observations in the local neighbourhood (see Öhrn & Beach (2019) for details). These data provide a backdrop to the analyses in the text.

### What Happened in School When the Refugees Arrived?

The refugees in 2015 were distributed by the authorities to places with access to refugee camps, vacant apartments or premises for temporary accommodation, but with rural communities receiving proportionally larger numbers (Skolinspektionen, 2016). There was some surprise in this. People in the municipalities and schools we visited typically expressed they had felt unprepared for the arrival and had been forced to improvise and develop plans and knowledge as they went along. A special needs teacher said:

*We were supposed to get information from the National Agency... but they didn't have time, so we had to reinvent the wheel. There ... wasn't material [and] so we had to figure out as we went along... When there were this many, what you had reasoned about before,... there was no routine, we lacked routines. ... Forty two they were in the preparation class. It was tough for them... and for teachers too, when it comes to students who have neither subject knowledge nor language skills. It didn't turn out well... This was autumn 2015. (Teacher, Inland)*

The number of refugees was of course a challenge in itself and the diversity of the group was another. They varied quite considerably with respect to previous formal education and language skills in English according to teachers and some had recently suffered significant traumatic experiences. Teachers and headteachers generally described students who they said had little prior education as posing the biggest challenge. Some of the issues, such as the lack of teachers (and sometimes also study counsellors and interpreters) with adequate language competence, were seen as more difficult in rural schools than in large urban ones, where there are typically more personnel who master various languages. However, at the same time as there were challenges, generally teachers in reception schools spoke about the arrival of a significant number of new pupils very positively, as providing a chance for development and new opportunities from a now growing local population. The refugee students' eagerness to go to school and learn was also spoken about with warmth and as much appreciated. The situation was challenging and brought about needs to re-think and re-organise teaching, and the pressed time-schedule and uncertainties about how many new students would arrive brought difficulties. Yet the teachers describe their all-round experiences of and encounters with the new population as positive.

### **Organisation of Teaching**

The reception and teaching approaches seemed to differ quite significantly between schools and regions in the study. The national policy regulating local organisational models was scant, corresponding mainly to regulations about assessment and providing education within a month. However, in January 2016 the Swedish Government via the Agency of Education legislated some changes restricting the definition of new arrival to a defined maximum period of four years. A new organisational form for education reception for new arrivals was also introduced.

The terminology used was *preparatory classes* (which is also the concept used in this text). Regulations stipulated that placements there should stretch over no more than two years maximum (<https://www.skolverket.se/regler-och-ansvar/ansvar-i-skolfragor/nyanlandas-ratt-till-stod>), and that wherever possible students should obtain at least some teaching in *regular classes*, as segregation for extended periods often results in early school leaving and non-attendance (Crul et al., 2019). There was however no strict stipulation concerning how many hours and in which subject integration should occur. The authorities left it to local municipalities to take local conditions into consideration and to, in collaboration with teachers, decide on this matter. The regulations made it possible to transfer students to regular classes at any time during any academic year and transfer was supposed to relate most to independent assessments of student development and needs. Teachers described some difficulties that they had experienced:

*We had ... little knowledge then... Now we know that it is very easy to get simultaneous interpretation. We didn't really know that at the time and... we didn't have the resources for the students to have the opportunity for the support they needed. (Swedish 2 - second language - teacher, River)*

According to the interviews, the initially chosen forms of teaching depended on local resources, rather than considerations regarding pedagogical theory and specific knowledge of the challenges of integrating young refugees into school and society. According to the comments of teachers and headteachers, they generally did not have this kind of specialist professional knowledge. Recent reforms in initial teacher education have tended to hollow out these types of components (Beach & Bagley, 2012, 2013) and practical considerations were foremost anyway at this time according to staff. The special preparatory groups demanded new spaces and more qualified staff. Integration in ordinary classes also called for more staff and, when classes grew too big, also more rooms in which to re-organise smaller classes and new schedules. Consequently, the number of arrivals and the local assets were mainly considered as crucial and headteachers attempted – and sometimes succeeded – to handle the lack of staff by calling on retired teachers, as in Inland school, to manage the preparatory classes:

*Initially we had two retired people who took a group... One... has worked as a teacher here before... So she came down and started working here, and then we had a teacher who had been on sick leave ...but who stepped in... She had decided to retire, but said “of course I have to help...” (Headteacher, Inland)*

An already existing organisation for teaching of young migrants also proved important for the organisation of teaching for the refugees. A teacher explained about the initial organisation:

*Then we had reception in two schools, one for younger and one older. We had a preparation class for each but then came this wave of new arrivals. We managed to deal with it beyond expectations. We had to open up new classes and found a location. First for the younger students... So we had activities in two classrooms... Later on we had the whole group together but we varied a little depending on the subject and prior knowledge. (Teacher, Sea)*

Teachers and headteachers described the teaching organisation in preparatory classes and regular ones as more or less flexible. As a result, students could for instance spend the main part of their days in a preparatory group and join regular classes at certain times and in certain subjects. Also, there were individual considerations related to students' age, previous education, feelings of safety, previous traumas, etc. The preparatory classes were typically situated quite close by the ordinary classes, usually in the same building or in an adjacent one, not in a separate area or school. Consequently, the students in preparatory classes were not isolated from other students and the associated risk of normalising a kind of otherness may have been reduced by this (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). Teachers also considered this close proximity to facilitate for students when being transferred to regular classes from preparatory ones, as the settings were not foreign to them.

The initial organisation then turned out to be tentative and flexible. It changed to adjust to (changes in) contexts. One headmaster described the process as a constant, ongoing adjustment to cope with the changes in staffing as well as inflow of students:

*After a year and a half... we got it all in order, when we got a new assistant principal... who had worked in SFL (Swedish as a Foreign Language) basically all her professional life... She sharpened things up and changed and improved them significantly. ... When she came into the picture there were clearer routines and a better structure. (Swedish 2 - second language - teacher, River)*

In addition to coping with changes in the stock of students and teachers, there were other features during the process that called for organisational adjustments. For instance, a headmaster in Mountain School told us that they had started with a rather fast transfer of refugee students to ordinary classes, but teachers had considered this a problem, and had felt that they were talking over the students' heads. So, they had changed to organise the newcomers in preparatory classes. This had lasted until the number of arrivals fell, then the school went back to a quick transfer to ordinary classes. It was the number of new students that was decisive according to informants.

When admitting students into ordinary classes teachers and headteachers operated as if some parts of the curriculum were more suitable for this. Subjects that were considered less dependent on Swedish were consequently seen as easier for the newly arrived refugees to cope with and became sites for the required integration expressed in new central policy. Especially practical-aesthetical subjects and sports (and sometimes the natural sciences) were more often taught in regular classes, either as a first step of moving into such classes or as a kind of integration while being taught mainly in preparatory classes. However, teachers expressed often that this had been more problematic than anticipated, as these subjects were not as independent of Swedish mastery as first assumed. For instance at Inland and Sea Schools students were rather quickly transferred to regular classes in practical subjects, but this did not always work out well:

*The idea of sending them to the practical subjects... was that there you can see how to do things, even if you don't understand what is being said. You can see it. And of course you can, but the hard part... was to get them to understand the spirit of an exercise, for example. That we train one thing and then, maybe use it then similarly in a different context... It was just lost, they could be good in sports, for example, but with problems in games they had never done before... Also, most boys were used to sports, but the girls weren't... The guys played football, it was almost the only thing... they wanted to do, but when they were involved in something else, it became frustrating explaining rules to someone who doesn't know the language... So, it was really difficult, and then it doesn't matter that you can see how you do it. The same with teaching about injury risks. They have to understand it. (PE Teacher, Inland)*

### **Content and Forms of Teaching**

Our earlier project publications highlighted some local rural contextualisation of the official national curriculum, but also that the communication and examination of the quintessentially official curriculum content remained as the main aim (Öhrn & Beach, 2019). Rural schools operated in this sense as urban schools in rural places, rather than as schools that valorised local values and content as of great value. However, staff regularly described that they introduced various changes in the forms of teaching as the refugees arrived that also affected local students who were already attending the school. This included provision of distinct information at the introduction and closing of lessons. Examples given to us related to using bullet points on the whiteboard specifying content and goals of the lesson and what students were to practice on in homework. Teachers also said they had begun to sum up important goals and points of learning at the end of the lesson. Providing illustrative support for word comprehension and spelling 'difficult' words on the white board were other features, along with the listing of synonyms and supporting verbal explanations with pictures.

The new innovations and the ways staff motivated them, related in other words to enhancing the formal curriculum content by scaffolding learning and being more effective in communication. They were presented in a very pragmatic way and without recourse to an established foundation of educational theoretical knowledge from for instance research in multilingual learning environments or on translingual cross-cultural learning studies. Though the changes had links to courses that teachers joined run by or on behalf of the Swedish National Agency for Education, their design was for pragmatic/practical local development work, where teachers acted and observed each other's teaching and jointly discussed the observations from the perspective of successful praxis without attempting to link to scientific knowledge about theories of learning:

*We went on three training courses, the literacy lift, grading and assessment, and a course from the Special Education School Authority that everyone participated in... And then we went to each other's classes and watched the beginning and end of them, and then got together and talked about it. There was a completely different openness... But you also have a little bit of a problem with that, being able to talk, like that. There's a lot that's changed and even an attitude towards being open. (Swedish 2 - second language - teacher, Coastal)*

Although the number of refugee students had sharply decreased in all of the observed schools at the time of the interviews, several of the changes teachers had said they had introduced had also prevailed. Teachers claimed in line with this to be more sensitive to language differences, and to think about varying their language (use more synonyms for instance), to use pictures to support explanations, and to structure tasks/lessons more explicitly (for instance by writing them down on the white board). This was generally helpful for all students (including Swedish-born ones) who experience some kind of difficulties (language wise or otherwise) or need a clear structuring.

... [everyone realized] yes but this is also good for the S2 students, so what we learn about language disorders, autism and all that stuff, it's also good for the S2 students. They kept up with it and... could see gains. (Swedish 2 - second language - teacher, Coastal)

Some teachers also commented that following on the arrival of the refugees and the subsequent changes in teaching, language became more of a responsibility for teachers in general and less exclusively for 'special'/language/Swedish as second language-teachers only. Still, some wished for even more awareness of the importance of language among teachers in general. This is an important point in relation to the contexts of learning in the present study. Research has shown over many decades now a close relationship between language and learning and how changes in students' (and above all developing/ young students') language systems change their ways of thinking (Halliday, 1986; Vygotskij, 1986). Also known is that there is a division between everyday language and school language (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Bailey, 2007) and that as children learn subject-specific language in school, their linguistic resources expand (Viberg, 1996).

The importance of teachers in complex linguistic and developmental circumstances who are knowledgeable about these circumstances and the demands of teaching and learning in them has moreover been known for decades (Daniels & Lee, 1989). Yet the second language perspective is largely excluded generally in teacher education (Wedin & Rosén, 2022), both relating to the aspect of translanguaging (Paulsrud & Zilliacus, 2018) and the need for a multilingual perspective (Haddix 2008; Rodriguez-Mojica et al. 2019; Li et al. 2021). This may damage the learning opportunities recognised for transnational second language learners and the capabilities of teachers and schools to support their learning and integration.

*It's not just S2 teachers who are supposed to work wonders... the whole school has to take responsibility and we did... But maybe not with the kind of impact for them going out in the classes. And that teachers can translate this theoretical way of relating to teaching... It is clear when teachers have very many different tasks to be applied. So, it's hard and it is difficult to collaborate, plan so that they can adapt to all students' difficulties and needs. And this became very apparent when the new arrivals... went out to the classes... (Swedish 2 - second language - teacher, Sea)*

The schools typically developed their forms of teaching, but the changes of content appear to be small. Teachers reported of some sensitivity towards different national holidays, traditions etc. in teaching. There were also occasional mentions of awareness that some competences as swimming, skiing and bicycling cannot be taken to be generic the way they often were in the past and that changes in activities such as open days needed to be made concerning celebrations and holidays:

*Some things are, somehow, untouchable. We celebrate Lucia with pomp and circumstance in this place and we end the school year with great pomp and circumstance... It was actually fun for them to see the dressing up and things... and we've covered everything in terms of food... with consideration for who's going to be involved, for example... Maybe these are students who have never done some things... We've come up with the idea in middle school that we're going out skiing or something but we have to think, wait a minute "how do we need to think here". In the swimming pool too. (Special Ed Teacher, Inland)*

Taken together, the interviews gave the impression of sensitivity towards individual differences in student's academic backgrounds, but changes in curriculum packaging were relatively few in scale, and relatively normative in relation to the communication of official knowledge. The aim was to create conditions from which new refugees could be schooled in the conventional sense in relation to official knowledge, rather than empowered and educated as transnational individuals in Sweden as a complex multi-cultural country where many different first languages are spoken (Eliaso Magnusson, 2020). It seems little notice was given to these features directly. Knowledge and preparation time in teacher education might be lacking, but there were some references

given to efforts at adapting content to accord with the new students' history and home country and culture.

*I had couple of Muslim students and when questions came up about events in the world, I asked if they could give their take on them or describe how the event was described where they came from. Later, it emerged during mentoring, that they felt singled out and associated with fundamentalist perspectives and events. (Social Science Teacher, River)*

After this, the teacher hesitated to refer to experiences of the migrated students and to include content and information from regions where they came from. However, he found this to bring about other problematics, as Swedish History and Social Science textbooks have a Western oriented narrative that would benefit from being put in perspective.

Most striking as regards the content is perhaps the apparently unchanged presentations of the local/regional school and its surroundings. Presentations of 'us' and 'the place' are described in much the same way as when we visited the schools before the refugees came. As previously, schools in sparsely populated areas used more explicitly contextual content in relation to their historic and present surroundings. Examples included paintings with local motives, pictures by previous students, objects from nature and local handicrafts, etc (Öhrn & Beach, 2019). The refugee students arriving in and then leaving schools seemed to have made little difference to these features:

*There are now 93 students at the school, but during the refugee wave there were 164! It looks like normal now... Possibly there is something more to notice about cultural activities on the bulletin board ... but from what I see, there is no trace of the large number of students with a refugee background that previously existed at the school. (Fieldnotes Forest)*

Material representations in the school buildings of the local place and its inhabitants had thus not changed. Neither had discursive representations. The discourse was still "everyone knows everyone" (in Swedish: "alla känner alla") - yet the refugees were obviously at risk of being excluded from this group of 'everybody'.

### **Challenges for Teaching During and After the Reception of Refugees**

Two points need to be emphasised as particularly problematic according to informants. One of them concerns the problems created by the limited time for preparation and organising the reception of the refugees and the consequences of downscaling the reception project when they were moved on. The other relates to changes in views about migration, refugees and integration across the reception and integration period.

#### **Lack of Support, Preparation Time and Downsizing Effects**

The initial reception of the refugees in some municipalities posed rather extensive challenges. The authorities were typically considered to have been very late in informing municipalities and in providing sufficient help and guidance. Courses from the National Agency for Education were considered helpful for introducing and developing teaching methods, but often came late, even after the students' arrival, when staff was already fully occupied with their new charges. New rules and guidelines were a problem too as they introduced more work for the schools:

*When the National Agency new directives came... we'd had new arrivals before, so it wasn't new... But on the other hand, it definitely generated a great deal of stress for staff doing these surveys that had to be done within two months. [...] We sent several staff on a course, I also took a course that the Agency had. (Headteacher, Coastal)*

The economic support provided by the state to local municipalities lagged (as also pointed out by later state reports, e.g., SOU 2017, p. 12), but municipalities were eventually given full cost

recovery. Consequently, the financial coverage *during the reception* did not stand out as a major problem. Instead, the downsizing *after* the refugees left or were moved to other places posed a primary concern. However, it might also be that the downsizing appeared particularly pressing at the time of our interviews, when most refugees had left, and the aftermath posed as the most urgent issue for the municipalities to cope with. The local parties had worked hard to organise for a growing body of refugee families and students, and their leaving also required work and time to re-organise. This is not a quick procedure. Dismissing staff and terminating agreements cannot be immediately effected. It takes time:

*Under the circumstances the municipality handled things well... but it's not easy to lay off rented properties at short notice to shed costs... Same thing with staff. Up to six to nine months... as we have notice periods and things like that. The new arrivals were moved but the municipality still has the costs to shed. (Head of New Arrivals Office, Mountain Municipal Council)*

A chief education authority officer in Sea Municipality said that they “almost panicked” when the number of refugees decreased. As a poor rural municipality, they depend on various state grants—in this respect as others—and the withdrawal caused grave problems. As the headmaster at Sea School said, “*This isn't a wealthy authority. We don't have that much money!*”

### **Changing Views on Migration, Refugees, and Integration**

The staff interviews pointed to the encounter with eager and hard-working students as very rewarding aspects of the reception. Teachers in all schools talked about this feature and were very appreciative of students who they expressed as seeming to enjoy school a lot:

*On the stairwell, I met a teacher... He said that when they had many students was fun, although he added too that it may be that he had forgotten the hard part. It was fun to have students who liked going to school he said and remembered how when the students got to draw and tell what they did during the Christmas holidays one of them had drawn someone half-lying on the bed—just waiting to go back to school. (Field notes, Forest)*

In addition to points like those above, staff regularly mentioned positive experiences of the reception with respect to how much they had learnt as teachers. Some also said that they hoped that in the event of a new stream of arrivals “*they could take on as many as possible*” (Teacher, Forest). Furthermore, there were expressions of strong concern for the refugee students with whom they had now lost contact, and how they and their families would manage.

*We had someone we wanted to go to a tenth year of school and there I remember this was a stressor for staff, because you are, ehh, you become deeply touched by human destinies... Difficult not to be touched but still needing to try not to fall into that trap. (Headteacher, Mountain)*

Concern about the future lot of students and their families emerged to various degrees and in various ways in the schools, but generally related both to students’ chances of managing school in a new country, with traumatic histories, and without knowing the language and curriculum. It acknowledged their position as refugees and whether they might (have to) leave the local place, or worse, the country. As for the latter one teacher said:

*Just during this year, we've said goodbye to three students. This is OK if you know that they are going to another Swedish municipality. You can have SMS contact, etc. But when they are actually going out of the country. Then it's horrible. I understand that not everyone can stay. But it is not reasonable that the processes take so much time for the students who are waiting for ‘their turn’... It's cruel. (Teacher, Sea)*

Considering how the teachers commented on the study interest and ambition expressed of the students, they experienced the realisation of their meagre chances of success as very stressful.

They said that despite all the hard work from the students, and regardless of their individual capabilities and desires, most of them would not be able to meet the requirements of the formal curriculum well enough to pass their courses. Communicating this risk of failure to students and their parents was a further source of tension.

*They were really good maybe in the school where they come from, and then they come to us and we say that it will be a really long time maybe before they get grades because this subject is one they have not studied before. Girls who haven't studied the same subjects as boys and such is another problem... It's been quite a challenge to describe the school system and explain it. (Special Ed Teacher, Inland)*

Something we mentioned previously (namely the hollowing out of theoretical and academic content from teacher education, and moving teacher preparation back toward a teacher training paradigm (Beach & Bagley, 2013)) may be relevant in relation to the above extract. The latter makes it clear how teachers are able to recognise a systemic abuse of their students but have no ideas at all about what to do about this mistreatment. In other words, they:

- Knew there was a problem and how it appeared
- Could and did talk about the problem with each other and in interviews with us
- Had no course of professional action to overcome the problem.

The students' failing to "make their grades" became a simple inevitability in the expressions from the teachers, and a mere fact of practice rather than a challenge they could actually do something about as professionals. Teacher education had not provided opportunities to discuss professionally how students in complex linguistic contexts and translanguaging actually learn, and what this meant for how to assess them justly and equally in relation to others. This challenge remained outside their professional repertoire.

### Closing Remarks

The starting point for the project reported on in this article was how rural communities in various locations handled the educational reception of large groups of refugees. The municipalities and their schools had different resources available, little time to prepare for the reception, and received very few guidelines. This may reflect the attitudes of central political authorities toward national peripheries and the individuals who formed the new diaspora (Crul et al., 2019). However, the preparation of teachers in Swedish teacher education appears to be another problem, if schools are to be able to make successful contributions to young migrant reception and resettlement along the lines of Arar et al. (2019), Taylor and Kaur Sidhu (2012) and others (such as e.g. García-Carmona et al., 2021; Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2010). Research based scientific professional content knowledge has been stripped out of teacher education programmes according to Beach and Bagley (2012, 2013) and this may have contributed to schools being unable to respond adequately to the demands of providing an empowering education for new refugees and unable to understand that this is neither their fault nor that of their charges (Eliaso Magnusson, 2020). Teachers and headteachers showed great sympathy, charity, and concern for the plight of the new refugee students and they also became very impressed by their study commitment and desire to learn. Yet they were still terrorised by the knowledge that they were effectively unable to help them do so sufficiently well "to make the grade".

The different models for organising teaching in schools came to depend on local resources and ideas rather than pedagogical theory and research based professional knowledge. The idea that some school subjects are better suited than others for rapidly integrating bi-lingual students, is an example. It allowed larger groups but was based on a fallacy about the easiness of practical learning compared to academic and a lack of knowledge about cross-cultural bilingual learning and learners. It was an example of how forms of teaching were said by teachers to have changed in some respects, after the reception of the refugees in 2015, but this kind of change in form

aside, as regards teaching content, neither observations nor interviews indicated that it had changed. Curriculum content and discourses of the local place and its members (the who-we-are or 'us') had remained largely the same. Some beneficial changes in instruction were said to have remained even after the refugee students left, due to their value for all students.

As we write this, the number of refugee students from 2015 has sharply decreased in all the observed schools. This downsizing for some schools and municipality agents appeared to present almost greater challenges than the reception and integration did. It helped shed otherwise inevitably unbearable economic costs but was difficult to handle for municipalities with small financial resources. Accordingly, there were several examples of strong local critique toward the authorities for neglecting the economic and demographic problems they created.

## References

- Arar, K., Brooks, J., & Bogotch, I. (2019). Introduction: Understanding immigrant and refugee education. In K. Arar, B. Jeffrey, & I. Bogotch, (Eds), *Education, immigration and migration: Policy, leadership and praxis for a changing world* (pp. 1–12). Emerald Publishing.
- Bailey, A.L. (2007). *The language demand of school. Putting academic English to the test*. Yale University Press.
- Beach, D., & Bagley, C. (2012). The weakening role of education studies and the re-traditionalisation of teacher education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(3), 287–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.692054>
- Beach, D., & Bagley, C. (2013). Changing professional discourses in teacher education policy back towards a training paradigm: a comparative study. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(4), 379–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2013.815162>
- Beach, D., & Öhrn, E. (2021). Using rural frameworks and research to develop understandings of educational justice and equity across sociospatial settings. In P. Roberts & M. Fuqua (Eds), *Ruraling education research* (pp. 77-90). Springer.
- Bunar, N. (2017). Migration and education in Sweden: Integration of migrants in the Swedish school education and higher education systems, NESET II ad hoc question No 3/2017. <https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Migration-and-Education-in-Sweden.pdf>
- Corbett, M. (2007). *Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Crul, M., Lelie, F., Biner, Ö., Bunar, N. , Keskiner, E. , Kokkali, I. , Schneider, J., & Shuayb, M. (2019). How the different policies and school systems affect the inclusion of Syrian refugee children in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon and Turkey. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7(10), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0110-6>
- Daniels, H., & Lee, J. (1989). Stories, Class and Classrooms: Classic tales and popular myths, *Educational Studies*, 15(1), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305569890150101>
- Eliaso Magnusson J. (2020). Språk, diaspora, makt. Flerspråkiga resurser och diasporaidentiteter bland unga vuxna i Sverige. Centre for Research on Bilingualism. (Diss.) <http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1468515/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Forsberg, G., Lundmark, M., & Stenbacka, S. (2012). *Demokratiska myter: Föreställningar om landsbygden – mer myter än faktiska fakta*. ÖhrlingsPwC.

- García-Carmona, M., Fuentes-Mayorga, N., & Rodríguez-García, A-M. (2021) Educational leadership for social justice in multicultural contexts: The case of Melilla, Spain. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 20(1), 76-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1833939>
- Glorius, B., Bürer, M., & Schneider, H. (2021). Integration of refugees in rural areas and the role of the receiving society: Conceptual review and analytical framework. *Erdkunde*, 75(1), 51-60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27090855.pdf>
- Haddix, M. (2008). Beyond sociolinguistics: Towards a critical approach to cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher education. *Language and Education*, 22(5), 254-270.
- Halfacree, K.H. (1995). Talking about rurality: Social representations of the rural as expressed by residents of six English parishes. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11(1), 1-20. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167\(94\)00039-C](https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167(94)00039-C)
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1986). *Learning how to mean. Explorations in the development of language*. Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K., & Martin, J. (1993). *Writing science: Literacy and discursive power*. Falmer Press.
- Hek, R. (2005). The experiences and needs of refugee and asylum seeking children in the UK: A literature review. University of Birmingham: Department for education and skills. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/5398/1/RR635.pdf>
- Johansson, M. (2019). Places and schools in times of demographic change. In E. Öhrn & D. Beach (Eds), *Young people's life and schooling in rural areas* (pp. 83-103). the Tufnell press.
- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383>
- Leyshon, M. (2008). The betweenness of being a rural youth: inclusive and exclusive lifestyles. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 9(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360701789535>
- Li, G., Anderson, J., Hare, J., & McTavish, M. (2021). *Superdiversity and teacher education: supporting teachers in working with culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse students, families, and communities*. Routledge.
- Massey, D. (1994/2013). *Space, place and gender*. Polity Press.
- Moilainen, M. (2012). Job is where the heart is? An analysis of geographic labour mobility among young adults'. In U-D Bæck & G. Paulgaard (Eds), *Rural futures?* (pp. 83-102). Orkana Akademisk.
- Nilsson, J., & Bunar, N. (2016). Educational responses to newly arrived students in Sweden: Understanding the structure and influence of post-migration ecology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 399-416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1024160>
- Öhrn, E., & Beach, D. (2019) (Eds). *Young people's life and schooling in rural areas*. the Tufnell press.

- Paulsrud, B., & Zilliacus, H. (2018). Flerspråkighet och transspråkande i lärarutbildningen. In B, Paulsrud, J. Rosén, B. Straszer & Å. Wedin (Eds.). *Transspråkande i svenska utbildningssammanhang* (pp. 27-48). Studentlitteratur.
- Rodriguez-Mojica, C., Briceno, A., & Munoz-Munoz, E.R. (2019). Combating linguistic hegemony: Preparing and sustaining bilingual teacher educators in the United States. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 57-78. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1221716.pdf>
- Rosvall, P.-Å. (2017). Understanding career development amongst immigrant youth in a rural place. *Intercultural Education*, 28(6), 523-542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2017.1392680>
- Rosvall, P.-Å. (2022). Transitions and trajectories for school students requiring additional support: A local lens. *Educational Research*, 64(2), 191-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2022.2055602>
- Rosvall, P.-Å., Carlbaum, S., & Benerdal, M. (2022). Globalisation in Swedish rural areas: Organisation of adult education and transitions to work for immigrants in times of depopulation. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 20(5), 718-730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2021.2013165>
- Rye, J.F. (2006). Rural youth's images of the rural, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(4), 409-421. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0743016706000040?via%3Dihub>
- Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 558-589.
- Shucksmith, M., Cameron, S., Merridew, T., & Pichler, F. (2009). Urban-rural differences in quality of life across the European Union. *Regional Studies*, 43(10), 1275-1289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400802378750>
- Skolinspektionen. (2016). Skolinspektionens årsrapport 2016. Stockholm. <https://www.skolinspektionen.se/globalassets/02-beslut-rapporter-stat/granskningsrapporter/regeringsrapporter/arsrapport/arsrapport-2016/arsrapport-skolinspektionen-2016.pdf>
- SOU 2017:12. Att ta emot människor på flykt. Sverige hösten 2015. Stockholm: Official reports of the Swedish government. [https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/e8c195d35dea4c05a1c952f9bb0b45f38/hela-sou-2017\\_12\\_webb\\_2.pdf](https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/e8c195d35dea4c05a1c952f9bb0b45f38/hela-sou-2017_12_webb_2.pdf)
- Taylor, S., & Kaur Sidhu, R. (2012). Supporting refugee students in schools: What constitutes inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(1), 39-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903560085>
- Viberg, Å. (1996). Svenska som andraspråk I skolan. In K. Hyltenstam (Ed.). *Tvåspråkighet med förhinder? Invandrar- och minoritetsundervisning i Sverige* (pp. 110-148). Studentlitteratur.
- Vygotskij, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. MIT Press.
- Wedin, Å., & Rosén, J. (2022). Lärare för andra? Aktörskap, kompetens och yrkesroller på språkin introduktionsprogrammet. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 27(2), 54-74. <https://open.lnu.se/index.php/PFS/article/view/2754/2861>

Willis, P., & Trondman, M. Manifesto for ethnography. *Ethnography*, 1(1): 5-16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138002223>