



Newcomers
with
Disabilities

Structural and physical integration barriers faced by Newcomers with disabilities in Sweden

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Newcomers with
Disabilities in
Sweden in
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Structural and physical integration barriers faced by Newcomers with disabilities in Sweden

After running several workshops with newcomers, refugees, and asylum seekers with disabilities in Sweden, we found several physical and structural integration barriers they face on their way to integrate in the Swedish Society.

These thematic workshops were sponsored by UNHCR Northern Europe the UN refugee organization. The workshops included topics such as housing, jobs, mental-health, introduction to basic apps needed to survive in Sweden society such as bank ID app and leadership skills. Through the above thematic workshops, we found that refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities in Sweden face both structural and physical barriers.

Structural barriers

Establishment time is uniform, not individual

Establishment time is the time (two years) during which the municipalities take care of refugees with the aim to integrate them into Swedish society. Uniform establishment time is disadvantageous for refugees with disabilities as they need more than two years to integrate into the Swedish society. Reasons for the need of more time for the establishment time can be delays in accessing necessary LSS services, a need for rehabilitation or medical interventions. Without proper help and care, a person with disabilities cannot function in the same way as someone who does not have any disabilities. This leads to inequality in regard to establishment time.

Housing

Special disability que with bostadsförmedlingen is not working as most of the applications for special disability que by refugees with disabilities are rejected. Bostadsförmedlingen's requirements are not clear and getting the necessary documents can be difficult both due to language barriers but also because one is referred back and forth between authorities.

Lack of Jobs

Many refugees with disabilities have limited chances of finding jobs due to discrimination by companies. Arbetsförmedlingen is not able to support refugees with disabilities in their search for jobs. Many refugees with disabilities are left to apply for jobs they cannot do, making the effort useless. There is no separate service for refugees with disabilities to find a job. Having to

search for jobs in the whole of Sweden is not applicable since the services you need can take time to establish in the new municipality.

Subsidized employment

The Swedish government recognized the difficulties faced by people with disabilities to get into the Swedish job market and hence often give subsidies to employers to hire disabled persons. This creates a difficult situation for disabled refugees and asylum seekers since this type of job is not considered employment. The Swedish migration agency does not regard subsidized wages as income hence the disabled refugees cannot get permanent residence permit, Swedish citizenship or do family reunion all of which require proof of income.

Language barrier

Refugees with disabilities, especially those with visual impairment, have a difficult time finding SFI schools that are suited to their needs. Having to use interpreters, they do not trust, to tell intimate details about one's life can lead to leaving out important details. Sometimes the interpreters are not well trained, and this can affect their migration status. Phone calls can be especially challenging if one is new to the language. The person at the other end expects you to understand the message, but it might not be clear at all. You might even be talking about different things entirely, making communication impossible.

Lack of knowledge of the LSS law

In Sweden it is expected of everyone to know their rights. Unfortunately, refugees with disabilities are not familiar with LSS law that gives information about persons with disabilities rights in Sweden. This can lead to not applying for services that one has the right to. There is also a big chance that the application is rejected because important details are left out due to lack of knowledge.

Lack of färdtjänst

Asylum seekers do not have the right to färdtjänst taxis creating difficulty for them to leave their house, attend appointments or meet friends. Especially during the winter months many are forced to stay inside.

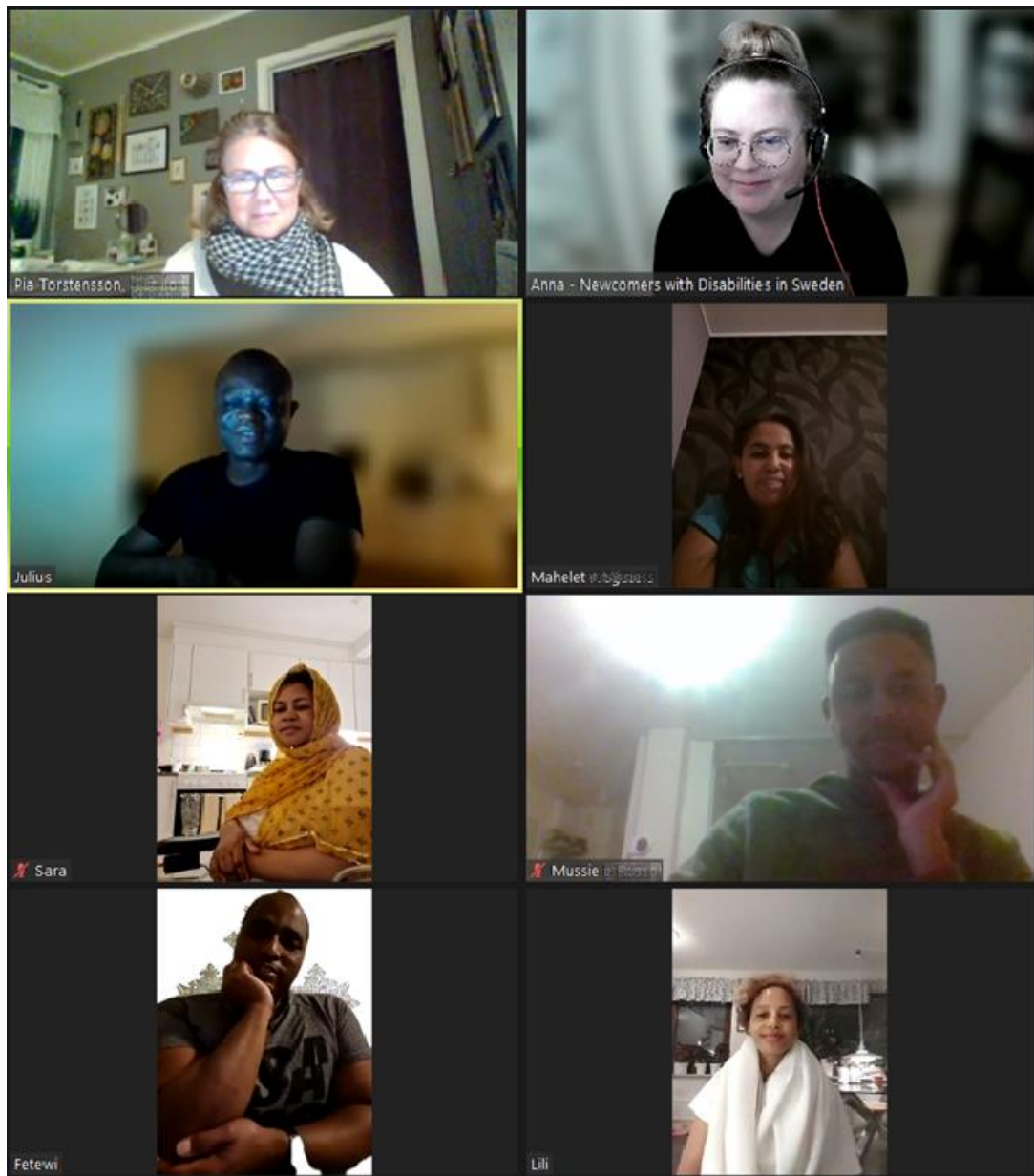
Lack of IT skills

To survive in the Swedish society, one needs to be able to identify oneself using Bank ID. Creating and using Bank ID is not simple for someone having little or no IT skills. Just using a mobile phone can be challenging. To find information one needs to be able to make adequate

searches online. Not being critical of one's sources leads to making the wrong decision. This can have long lasting effect on a person's life.

Leadership skills

In Sweden one is assumed to be able to lead oneself. Since many refugees with disabilities never get a job, this is a skill they never have the chance to practice. Leading oneself requires understanding of what is expected of you. These expectations might not be very clear due to the language barrier.



Creating a sense of community. Breaking isolation.

Physical barriers

Refugees with disabilities faces problems which are not only structural barriers but also physical barriers. These physical barriers affect their ability to integrate in the Swedish society and negatively affect their mental health.

Lack of accessible accommodation

Refugees with disabilities often rent second-hand apartments which are not accessible to their needs. This is often since their applications to the special disability at bostadsförmedlingen queue are rejected. Hence forcing them to rent apartments with no elevator or accessible bathroom. The housing provided by the municipalities are not always accessible and many are faced with high rents when renting a place from a private individual (second-hand rental).

Isolation

Refugees with disabilities face isolation in Stockholm because it is difficult for them to speak the language or have a job. They sometimes feel that they are not welcomed, which affects their social life. Since a healthy social life and a sense of community is an essential part of humanity and a requirement for good mental health, isolation can cause a lot of suffering.

Transportation

We all need to get around to meetings, appointments, to the store and so on. As a refugee with disabilities, you face physical barriers in your everyday life. Suddenly the lift at the metro station is not in use, or the escalators are being repaired. The numbers on the bus are not lit up so you cannot see which bus is approaching. A doorway may be too narrow to let your wheelchair through. In an older house the lift can be too small for your wheelchair or getting to the lift requires you to walk a few stairs leaving your wheelchair unattended for the time of the visit. Winter brings its own challenges. One might not be able to go outside because of icy roads that can lead to an accident. There is so much snow that one cannot make it to the store.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the life for a refugee with disabilities is greatly affected by both structural and physical barriers. Many barriers could be removed by changing legislation, but there is also a need to change in the social environment to welcome refugees and refugees with disabilities into the Swedish society. The very basic needs are not met when refugees with disabilities are isolated both physically and socially. Their special needs are not met without a fight for each right. It is up to luck, the person you are served by and the region you live in if one receives the needed services and the necessary help to integrate into the Swedish society.