

AT HOME IN  
**EUROPE**

# SOMALIS

IN **MALMÖ**

**Somalis in European Cities**

# Somalis in Malmö

At Home in Europe

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For more information contact:

AT HOME IN EUROPE

OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR EUROPE

Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank,  
London, SW1P 4QP,  
UK

Website

[www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/home-europe](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/home-europe)

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## Open Society Foundations Mission Statement

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This city report was prepared as part of a series of reports titled Somalis in European Cities. The series focuses on seven cities in Europe with a Somali origin population. The cities chosen, and within them specific neighbourhoods, are Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo.

The reports have been prepared by At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations and in cooperation with local/national based experts.

The Somalis in Malmö report has been researched and drafted by Benny Carlson, Professor of economic history, School of Economic and Management, Lund University. Benny conducted all the stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions bar three.

Fozia Sloane, deputy project leader at the Somali Information and Business Centre in Malmö, organised all the focus groups and provided translation in Somali at the sessions.

Karin Magnusson, MA in IMER, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare, Malmö University, conducted the women's focus groups.

Rickard Lagervall, MA and Ph.D, Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, wrote sections 2.3 and 2.4 on Somalis and Islam and Swedish Perceptions of Somalis.

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The recommendations were crafted by the Open Society Foundations on the basis of the findings of the report.

At Home in Europe has final responsibility for the content of the report, including any errors or misrepresentations.

**Open Society Initiative for Europe Team (At Home in Europe)**

Nazia Hussain	<i>Director</i>
Hélène Irving	<i>Program Coordinator</i>
Klaus Dik Nielsen	<i>Advocacy Officer</i>
Andrea Gurubi Watterson	<i>Program Officer</i>
Csilla Tóth	<i>Program Assistant</i>
Tufyal Choudhury	<i>Sen. Policy Advisor</i>

## PREFACE

A central belief of the Open Society Foundations is that all people in an open society count equally and should enjoy equal opportunities. The Open Society Foundations work day-to-day with civil society organizations across Europe to respond to discrimination, prejudice and injustice; to understand the emergence of new and sometimes worrying political phenomena; to inform better practices in policing and security; to connect those seeking justice and equality with policymakers and institutions; to promote inclusion for Europe's minorities; to support a critical and informed discourse among nongovernmental actors; and to empower grassroots organizations to seek change for themselves, unique to their own local context.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe. It places a high priority on local community and city level practices that mitigate discrimination and seek to ensure access to equal opportunities for all. At Home in Europe engages with policymakers, civil society organisations, and communities at the local, national and international level to improve the social inclusion of Europe's diverse minority and marginalised communities in different ways.

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity. The Somali community is one such emerging minority group on whom a lack of precise data hampers the possibility of achieving meaningful integration.

People of Somali origin have lived in parts of Europe for many generations but in the past 15 years their numbers have increased. There are no accurate figures for the number of Somalis in Europe but on the whole, whilst small in absolute numbers, they are among one of the continent's largest refugee groups and a growing minority population. Europe's Somalis can be divided into three broad categories: people of Somali origin born in Europe, Somali refugees and asylum seekers (who came directly from Somalia or neighbouring countries largely as a result of conflict) and Somalis who migrated to a country in Europe from elsewhere in Europe, such as from Sweden to the UK for example. They are a diverse and vibrant community who suffer from negative and biased media representation and stereotyping. There is a limited understanding on the specific needs of this community and they are in the category of groups that experience significant inequalities in accessing education, employment, health, and housing with resulting poor outcomes. Somali community groups are very present in certain countries in Europe but their engagement with policymakers and in local and national bodies can be relatively limited.



The comparative research series ‘Somalis in European Cities’ examines city and municipal policies that have actively sought to understand Somali origin communities and their specific needs. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents. An underlying theme is how Somali communities have themselves actively participated in tackling discrimination and whether the needs of specific groups warrant individual policy approaches in overcoming barriers to equal opportunities.

The ‘Somalis in European Cities’ series contains seven individual city reports and an overview. The cities selected take into account the population size, diversity, and the local political context. They are: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo. All seven city reports were prepared by teams of local experts on the basis of the same methodology to allow for comparative analysis. Each report includes detailed recommendations for improving the opportunities for full participation and inclusion of Somalis in wider society in the selected city. These recommendations will form the basis for At Home in Europe of the Open Society Initiative for Europe’s advocacy activities.

# Somalis in Malmö

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ABO	Accommodation provided by the Migration Board ( <i>anläggningsboende</i> )
BSS	Preserve Sweden Swedish ( <i>Bevara Sverige Svenskt</i> )
EBO	Own accommodation ( <i>eget boende</i> )
EU	European Union
HELMI	Health Migration Integration
MmD	Malmö against Discrimination ( <i>Malmö mot Diskriminering</i> )
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SFI	Swedish for Immigrants ( <i>Svenska för Invandrare</i> )
SKKF	Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture ( <i>Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening</i> )

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study on Somalis in Malmö, Sweden, discusses eight overarching themes and largely builds upon primary sources: Somali focus group discussions and interviews with stakeholders (public sector officials, community leaders, members of civil society organisations), all undertaken for this report to reveal a more nuanced perspective on an important population.

**Population:** Malmö has a population of roughly 300,000, of which 31 percent were born abroad. In 2011, there were 1,551 Somalia-born individuals in Malmö of which 77 percent lived in three city districts. Half of the Somalis in Malmö arrived in Sweden after 2005.

Sweden has a very heterogeneous Muslim population, resulting from half a century of immigration from all parts of the world. The number of Muslims is estimated at 350,000 to 400,000. Somalis represent the fourth largest group of Muslims after people from Iraq, the Balkans and Iran.

The perception of and debate on immigrants, among them Somalis, and Islam in Sweden has been affected by the Sweden Democrats, a populist party which entered the Swedish Parliament in 2010. The party leader has sounded warnings against the “wave of illiterates from Somalia” and the consequences of ethnic enclaves like “Little Mogadishu”. Issues like clan structure, educational levels, Islamic extremism and female genital mutilation have also triggered heated debates among journalists, politicians and academics.

**Policy context:** According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Sweden has the best integration policy in the world. A key sentence in the integration strategy of the Swedish government says that “selective measures directed towards foreign-born as a group must not be taken after the first period of time in Sweden”. At the regional and local levels one can find contradictory views among administrators regarding specialised programmes for integration. The City of Malmö was the first municipality in Sweden to launch a plan against discrimination. Very little is known about discrimination against Somalis in Malmö. However, in the spring of 2013 the organisation Malmö against Discrimination initiated an investigation into the possible discriminatory treatment of Somalis in connection with the lack of maintenance of their apartments.

**Identity and belonging:** Literature on Somali diasporas has dwelled on the importance of religion for maintaining identity and offering a moral compass in a new environment. The clan system seems to play a similar role, offering comfort and security but also social control.

Interviews with representatives of eight Somali associations in Malmö revealed that they often define integration as being active in society, knowing the language, being educated, having a job. They see lack of information, Swedish-language proficiency,



education and jobs as the main barriers or challenges facing Somalis. In general, they were cautious when discussing discrimination as a barrier, although it was noted that stereotyping and discrimination are a real challenge for youngsters born in Sweden who have command of the language and social codes. They enjoy living in Malmö because it is diverse and multicultural, although there are few job opportunities.

Focus group discussions largely confirmed the views in the literature. Religion plays an important role and Somalis find it easy to practise their religion in Malmö. Some argued that the clan has lost its relevance in Sweden, others argued that it is still very important. On the question of Somali and Swedish identities there is also ambiguity. Both men and women have difficulties adapting to new gender and generational relations. When men cannot find a job they end up “doing nothing” and the result is sometimes divorce or loss of respect from their children. Women lack the support system of family and relatives to take care of children and elders, which in Sweden is replaced by day-care and home-care services. Men or women, old or young, the message coming from Somalis is that they prefer to socialise with each other, partly because they feel freer and safer when doing so, partly because they lack proficiency in Swedish.

**Education:** 60–70 percent of Somalis in Sweden, including Malmö, have only primary or an unknown level of education. This makes it difficult for many Somalis to understand Swedish society and the concepts used in the Swedish language. Focus group discussants pointed to the difficulties for married women with children to focus on the programme Swedish for Immigrants (*Svenska för Invandrare*, SFI) and to the lack of role models and job opportunities, which means there are no incentives to learn the Swedish language well. The main argument about adult education was similar. All mothers in this focus group worried about the school situation and future opportunities for their children.

**Employment:** Employment among Somalis in Sweden has hovered at 25–30 percent and in Malmö at around 20 percent for a decade. The time since arrival and educational level to a large extent explain the low employment rate. Self-employment among Somalis in Sweden is weak, at 0.6 percent, compared with about 5 percent in the whole population; in Malmö the proportion fell from 1.7 percent in 2006 to 0.7 percent in 2010. Almost 70 percent of Somalis have no wage income.

When enlisted in the establishment procedure for new arrivals, many Somalis look for Somali-speaking introduction guides. These guides often find that they have to spend too much time helping participants with paperwork. The City of Malmö has a broad set of labour-market programmes. However, few Somalis are enrolled in them. Entrepreneurship among Somalis in Malmö (and all of Sweden) may be constrained by the lack of Islamic banking institutions. The focus group on employment found two simple and straightforward explanations for the low employment figures: “there are no jobs for Somalis who want to work” and “you get more out of social welfare than out of working”.

**Housing:** In Sweden and Malmö Somali residential clustering mainly serves to create comfort and security, not to create economic opportunities. More than 90 percent of all Somalis in Sweden live in rental apartments. The focus group discussion revolved around the difficulties of acquiring an apartment and in living with friends in crowded rooms. All participants were fairly happy about the quality of the apartments. The opinions about the residential areas were less favourable.

**Health and social protection:** A project on health among Somali women revealed that 70 percent say they are in good health. Many, however, abstain from seeking health care due to waiting time, bad experiences or linguistic difficulties. It is well known that some Somalis have mental health problems due to their experiences from the civil war, but are reluctant to seek help from psychiatrists and psychologists. In Malmö, the Red Cross has a centre for the treatment of war-wounded and tortured people. Among Somalis only women turn to this centre. The focus group discussion confirmed that Somalis have difficulties making appointments with and getting feedback from doctors. The discussants felt that they would like new arrivals to get more information on the health-care system and have someone speaking Somali employed at health-care centres.

Sweden's welfare system is famous for taking care of people from cradle to grave. The focus group's opinions on Sweden's welfare system were balanced. A rather telling statement was this: "Social protection is fine – but what about opportunities?" Some problems are difficult to solve due to compartmentalisation among Swedish authorities.

**Policing and security:** Among Somalis, Sweden is generally perceived to be a safe country. However, some areas have their share of trouble and crime, of which the Seved neighbourhood in Malmö is an example. Somalis seem to have been able to keep a low profile, minding their own business. Hate crimes in Malmö are primarily directed towards Jews, Muslims and Africans. The Öresund Bridge is the main route for smuggling khat into Sweden, but in Malmö other drugs are the primary targets for seizure by the police. Among focus group discussants the general opinion was that some districts where many immigrants live are pretty safe (Rosengård), whereas others (Seved) are more violent. Most discussants seemed to have a positive view of the police.

**Participation and citizenship:** Somalis are known for organising themselves to be able to navigate in new environments. There is no lack of Somali associations in Sweden but their presence is not powerful, since the public sector is supposed to take care of most needs and solve most problems. Activists and researchers with insights into the situation of Somalis in Sweden have argued for a larger role for associations, service centres and link workers or bridge-builders to assist new arrivals and others who have not been able to find the key to Swedish society. Regional and city authorities have taken some initiatives along this way, for instance a Somali information and business centre and the education and employment of Somali informants on Swedish society and health-care issues. Most Somali leaders see their relations with authorities as one-sided; they turn to authorities for information and help but authorities seldom turn to them. Focus group participants bore witness to the help they get from Somali

associations to solve practical problems. The opinion was that these associations could do much more if given resources.

In Sweden generally 30 percent of Somalia-born have Swedish citizenship; in Malmö the figure is about 40 percent. It takes Somalis eight years to be able to apply for citizenship, and this is a source of great frustration for them.

**Role of the media:** Somalis often claim that they are negatively portrayed in the media. A survey of recent articles in the dominating newspaper in Malmö does not confirm this claim. There is, of course, bad news about what happens in Somalia, but most articles with some local connection have a positive touch. There might, however, be spill-over from bad news in Somalia to Somalis in the diaspora. Most participants in the focus group on media had strong opinions. They considered Al Jazeera to be the only news channel which tells about reality in a balanced way. Younger participants were more negative towards the Swedish media than older ones.

**Recommendations:** Employment is the black hole in Somali life in Sweden. Lack of employment means poverty, lack of self-confidence, the disruption of families (including divorces) and children questioning whether it is meaningful to do their best in school. How can difficulties getting employment and starting businesses be mitigated? There is no quick fix, since it takes years of education and vocational training to get into today's labour market in Sweden. But some things could be done to speed up the process and stabilise conditions for Somali families.

The recommendations are mainly directed to the City of Malmö. They focus upon supporting and cooperating with Somali (and other immigrant) community organisations. These organisations could be given a more robust role as bridges between authorities and the Somali community. Cooperation between the City (and other authorities and service providers) and Somali organisations should be applied to all areas covered in this report – above all education, employment, housing, health and social security – and serve to disseminate correct information, improve accessibility to services, combat discrimination, and make use of the knowledge and commitment within the Somali community.

## METHODOLOGY

This is primarily a qualitative study built upon literature, documents, descriptive statistics, interviews with stakeholders from public authorities, civil society organisations and Somali associations, and, finally, focus group discussions.

The statistics on Somalis in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and all Sweden display in tables and figures the percentage of individuals in the Somalia-born population aged 16–64 in various categories (time in Sweden, age, marital status, number of children, education, employment, self-employment, wage income, housing, citizenship) in 2010, and in a few cases developments for ages 20–64 over time (employment 2000–2010, self-employment 2005–2010). The raw figures behind tables and figures have been bought from Statistics Sweden and are not available to anybody but the principal researcher.

To gather first-hand, primary data, 50 respondents were interviewed<sup>1</sup> and eight focus groups with Somalis were organised to discuss the themes of the study: identity and belonging, education, employment, housing, health and social protection, policing and security, participation and citizenship and the role of the media. Four additional groups based on age and gender – older women and men (aged 45 and over), young women and men (aged 18–35) – were also convened. In all 95 participants took part in focus group discussions.

The characteristics of focus group participants are shown in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Konstantinides and Gunnar Bergström, policy officers at the City of Malmö Department of Integration and Employment, served as initial “door-openers” to several stakeholders.

**Table 1. Characteristics of focus group participants**

No. of answers	Percent of answers				
	Before 1990	1991–2000	2001–2005	2006–2011	
Time in Sweden					
92	15	22	7	57	
Gender	Male	Female			
95	59	41			
Age	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-
92	37	22	21	11	10
Marital status	Married	Not married	Divorced	Widow(er)	
78	52	33	14	1	
No. of children	None	One	Two	Three	Four and above
83	37	13	7	7	35
Education	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
82	10	32	33	26	
Employment	Yes	No			
87	38	62			
Housing	Rental apt.	Condominium	Own house		
71	94	3	3		
Citizenship	Swedish	Other			
91	38	62			

The major differences between focus group participants and the Somalia-born population in Malmö are that participants display:

- a larger share of males;
- larger shares arrived before 1991 and after 2006;
- a larger share less than 30 and more than 50 years of age;
- a smaller share with no children and a larger share with four children or more;
- a larger share with secondary or tertiary education;

On the whole the focus group participants seem to be fairly representative of the Somali population in Malmö, with one exception: the large share of males. In Malmö, as in all Sweden, there are about as many males as females (in Malmö the males come to 48.7 percent). The differences in time of arrival, age and number of children are probably to some extent an effect of four focus groups composed of older and younger

people. The difference in education is to some extent an effect of there being no “unknown” factor (the share with no education among focus group participants is made clear).

Two difficulties with the data collection arose during the fieldwork. First, a few identified stakeholders did not wish to be interviewed. Second, the number and composition of participants in focus groups were not always predictable. Some of those who agreed to participate never showed up and their places were taken by others not contacted in advance. In particular, the composition of the focus group on identity was not sufficiently diverse and had to be supplemented, the groups with young men and women were too small and had to be complemented, and the discussion on health and social protection had to be undertaken on two occasions. In the end, therefore, 16 meetings were organised. Interviews with stakeholders were documented in notes and focus group discussions were recorded but not transcribed.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose and Themes

This study on Somalis in Malmö, Sweden, is part of a research series produced by the Open Society Foundations' At Home in Europe Project that aims to generate original comparative data on the views, experiences and concerns of Somalis and on the ways in which authorities address these challenges in seven European cities: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö and Oslo. The project builds upon the Open Society Foundations' previous research on the situation of Muslims in 11 European cities. During that project, researchers identified a lack of information and data about Somalis and a significant knowledge gap in policy planning for Somali communities. The purpose of the research on Somalis in European cities thus is to detail the prime concerns of Somalis, highlight the relevant policy initiatives and approaches and offer concrete policy recommendations to politicians and authorities at the city, regional, national and international levels.

In order to make comparisons between the seven city reports possible, each report utilises a common set of themes and methodological approaches. The report explores the experiences of Somalis under the headings of eight themes: identity and belonging; education; employment; housing; health and social protection; policing and security; civic and political participation; and the media.

The report begins in section 2 with details of the population and demographics of Malmö and the Somali population in particular. Section 3 provides an overview of the policy context of the city. Sections 4–11 examine the eight themes described, followed by the conclusion (section 12) and recommendations (section 13).

### 1.2 Why Somalis?

This report acknowledges the diversity within Somali communities, while recognising that they have common experiences which make it reasonable to focus upon them as a group: they originate from the Horn of Africa, they speak Somali (although with different dialects), they are Muslims, they come from a society to a large extent characterised by a nomadic clan culture but not by the development of industry and the welfare state, and they have experienced in turn colonialism, dictatorship, civil war and the subsequent collapse of the state.

Most migrants face difficulties in the transition from one environment to another. Somalis have faced the challenge of covering the distance in a few big leaps, from their original environment of a society in which the state is no longer functional, to Sweden, viewed as one of the most modern countries in the world with its powerful welfare state designed to take care of people's needs from cradle to grave. Furthermore, a majority of Somalis in Sweden arrived fairly recently, in the last six or seven years.

### 1.3 Why Malmö?

The focus of this report is Somalis living in Malmö, which is the third-largest and one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Sweden. In all Sweden 14 percent of the population have been born abroad. However, the majority of immigrants (more than 60 percent) are concentrated in the three metropolitan regions clustered around Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. In the rest of the country 10 percent of the population is foreign-born (third-country nationals). Out of Malmö's more than 300,000 inhabitants almost one third has been born abroad.<sup>2</sup>

As seen in Table 2, although these figures are a few years old, Malmö has the highest proportion of foreign-born residents among the larger cities of Sweden.

**Table 2. Foreign-born residents in larger cities and their regions (%), 2008**

Stockholm region (36 municipalities)	19
Gothenburg region (28 municipalities)	15
Malmö region (20 municipalities)	18
City of Stockholm	21
City of Gothenburg	21
City of Malmö	29

**Source:** Statistics Sweden, "Integration – ett regionalt perspektiv" (Integration – a Regional Perspective), 2010, pp. 44–45 (hereafter, Statistics Sweden, "Integration")<sup>3</sup>

Table 3 provides data from 2008 on the experience of the foreign-born residents in the Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö regions, and the City of Malmö. This shows that in a comparison of pivotal integration variables – time in Sweden, education and employment – between the metropolitan regions, Malmö has a foreign-born population with a comparatively weak foothold in the labour market and of which a greater proportion has spent less than five years in Sweden. According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, the median time between obtaining a residency permit and securing a job is seven years. A large proportion of people having lived less than five years in Sweden could thus to some extent explain the low level of employment among the foreign-born and the large employment gap in Malmö. However, many of these foreign-born residents who have spent a short time in Sweden are Danes who commute to work in Denmark. According to Statistics Sweden, employment among

<sup>2</sup> City of Malmö, *Plan of Action for Increased Participation and More Malmö Residents in Employment 2012*, City Office, Malmö, 2011, p. 14 (hereafter, City of Malmö, *Plan of Action 2012*) (no longer accessible online).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.scb.se/statistik/\\_publikationer/LE0105\\_2010A01\\_BR\\_BE57BR1001.pdf](http://www.scb.se/statistik/_publikationer/LE0105_2010A01_BR_BE57BR1001.pdf) (accessed 11 November 2013).



the foreign-born in the Malmö region would increase to 57 percent if these commuters were taken into consideration.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3. Foreign-born individuals' time spent in Sweden, post-secondary education, employment and the employment gap (%), 2008**

	≤5 years in Sweden	Post-secondary education	Employment	Employment Gap
Stockholm region	22	39	62	22
Gothenburg region	20	35	58	25
Malmö region	27	35	48	31
City of Malmö	29	34	43	32

**Notes:** Education and employment figures are for those aged 20–64. The employment gap is the difference in employment between natives and foreign-born

**Source:** Statistics Sweden, “Integration”, pp. 49, 54, 58.

Foreign-born residents in Malmö have their roots in no fewer than 175 countries. The city has, due to its diversity, turned into an ideological battleground between those who support multiculturalism and diversity and those preferring homogeneity.

The city's diversity brings benefits: a comparatively young population, an exciting cultural blend and a transformation from an old-fashioned industrial city into a city of knowledge with a large university of its own. There are also significant challenges: ethnic and social segregation, drop-outs from school and some high-profile crimes. In 2009–2010, a serial gunman was targeting immigrants, and in 2011 and early 2012, eight people were gunned down in the streets of Malmö, earning the city the nickname of Sweden's Chicago and making it a showcase deterrent example for right-wing populists not only in Sweden but also in the other Nordic countries.<sup>5</sup>

Johan Norberg, a Swedish author, catches the hopes and fears raised by the Malmö example:

Malmö is the city where post-industrialism and internationalism have gone the farthest and been compressed into the smallest surface, and therefore the city is a Rorschach test. We behold and judge the future of Sweden – for good and for bad. This is how the country will be if we do not change track, we hope or fear ... Here all things we discuss about society are concentrated: Globalisation and multiculturalism. The highest buildings, the longest bridges – and the worst schools. This is where barriers are lower, meetings easier and violence tougher.

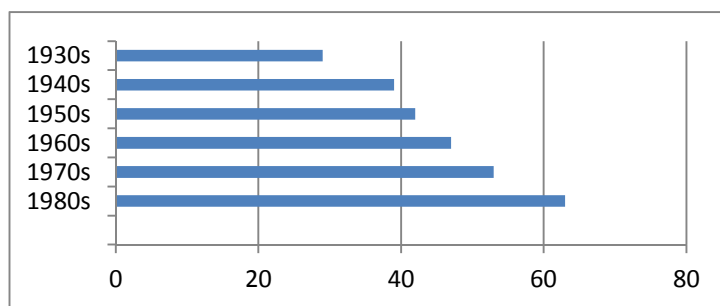
<sup>4</sup> See Statistics Sweden, “Integration”, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> This ideological battle was portrayed in “*Uppdrag granskning*” (Mission Scrutiny), a TV programme often watched by more than one million people, on 28 March 2012.

The best and the worst. We have seen the future, and we are not sure how it works.<sup>6</sup>

A report from the city administration in 2007 stated: “Studies have recently been presented, showing how people in the city move about and revealing frightening discoveries that some people never meet.”<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, a survey questionnaire answered by almost 1,000 Malmö citizens in 2008 showed that most encounters between Swedish-born and foreign-born people are perceived from both sides to be beneficial. Workplaces are the pivotal arena for these meetings. Younger people socialise across cultural boundaries more than older people, and also find these meetings to be more rewarding.<sup>8</sup> Age is an important variable in levels of interactions. Figure 1 shows that the younger people are, the more they socialise across ethnic and cultural boundaries in private life.

**Figure 1. People born in different decades who often meet people from another ethnic or cultural background in private life (% of respondents), 2008**



Source: P. Broomé, B. Carlson and I. Holmberg, unpublished research 2008.

<sup>6</sup> J. Norberg, “Stad i rörelse” (City in Motion), *Expressen*, 1 April 2012 at [expressen.se/kultur/stad-i-rorelse](http://expressen.se/kultur/stad-i-rorelse) (accessed 119 December 2013).

<sup>7</sup> City of Malmö, “Insikt: Lägesrapport om befolkningsutvecklingen i Malmö och regionen” (Insight: Report on Demographic Development in Malmö and the Region), City Office, Malmö, 2007, p. 8, at [Malmö.se/download/18.365accf7116191cc840800046041/IN-sikt+reviderad+071214.pdf#search='%C3%A4gesrapport+om+befolkningsutvecklingen+i+malmö%C3%B6+2007](http://Malmö.se/download/18.365accf7116191cc840800046041/IN-sikt+reviderad+071214.pdf#search='%C3%A4gesrapport+om+befolkningsutvecklingen+i+malmö%C3%B6+2007) (accessed 11 November 2012).

<sup>8</sup> P. Broomé, B. Carlson and I. Holmberg, “Integration pågår” (Integration in Progress), *Invandrare & Minoriteter* 37 (2) (2010), pp. 37–41.

## 2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the immigrant population in Malmö in general and about Somalis in Sweden and Malmö in particular. It also includes subsections on Somalis and Islam and on perceptions of Somalis in Sweden.

### 2.1 Malmö – A City of Immigrants

Malmö's population is (year 2012) approximately 308,000. The Malmö region has a population more than twice as large. 31 percent (95,000 individuals) of Malmö residents were born abroad. Furthermore, 11 percent of the population (33,000 individuals) were born in Sweden with both parents born abroad. 42 percent of the population thus belongs to the broader category of foreign background. The largest immigrant groups in 2012 were from Iraq (10,700 individuals) and Denmark (8,500). The fastest-growing groups are from Iraq and Syria. Since 1996, Malmö has been divided into 10 city districts (see Figure 2). In three districts the share of the population born abroad is larger than the city average: Rosengård, 61 percent, Fosie 49 percent and Södra Innerstaden 34 percent.<sup>9</sup> From 1 July 2013, following the merging of city districts, the total number of districts was reduced to five.

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<sup>9</sup> City of Malmö, *Malmö 2012: Befolkningsbokslut* (Malmö 2012: Population Accounts), City Office, Malmö 2013, pp. 3, 8-10, at [http://malmo.se/download/18.a81ab142d709775413c6/1386766723236/Befolkning\\_Malm%C3%B6\\_Bokslut\\_2012.pdf](http://malmo.se/download/18.a81ab142d709775413c6/1386766723236/Befolkning_Malm%C3%B6_Bokslut_2012.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2013).

**Figure 2. District map of Malmö**

Source: See [malmö.se/images/18.72bfc4c412fc1476e0280007855/stadsdelar.png](http://malmö.se/images/18.72bfc4c412fc1476e0280007855/stadsdelar.png) (accessed 11 November 2013)

## 2.2 Facts about Somalis in Sweden and Malmö

Somali immigration to Sweden of any substantial size began in the late 1980s, but more than 70 percent of Somali residents arrived after 2000 and this immigration increased at the end of this period.<sup>10</sup> In 2012 there were almost 44,000 Somalia-born in Sweden.<sup>11</sup> Sweden has together with the Netherlands in recent years emerged as a major host country for Somali refugees. In 2009 and 2010 a little more than half of asylum applications of Somalis in Western countries were made in these two countries together.<sup>12</sup> Between 2000 and 2012 around 35,100 Somalis applied for asylum in

<sup>10</sup> B. Carlson, K. Magnusson and S. Rönnqvist, *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden – har Sverige något att lära?* (Somalis on the Labour Market – Has Sweden Anything to Learn?), Report No. 2 to the Future Commission, Government Offices of Sweden, Office for Administrative Affairs, Stockholm, 2012, p. 64 (hereafter, Carlson et al., *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden*).

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.scb.se/sv/\\_/Hitta-statistik/Statistikdatabasen/TabellPresentation/?layout=tableViewLayout1&rxid=f87d64a1-53e1-42dd-a0ee-f7f38264a0da](http://www.scb.se/sv/_/Hitta-statistik/Statistikdatabasen/TabellPresentation/?layout=tableViewLayout1&rxid=f87d64a1-53e1-42dd-a0ee-f7f38264a0da) (accessed 15 December 2013).

<sup>12</sup> B. Carlson et al., *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden*, p. 43.

Sweden with a dramatic increase in 2007 and after. In 2012 there were 5,644 applications. Of the 4,772 decided, 90 percent were accepted.<sup>13</sup>

Sweden thus has a far higher proportion of Somali immigrants than other countries where many Somalis live. People born in Somalia make up 0.4 percent of the Swedish population; In the UK the corresponding figure is 0.17 percent, in the Netherlands 0.16 percent and in the United States 0.03 percent.<sup>14</sup>

In 2011, there were 1,551 Somalia-born individuals in Malmö, of which 77 percent lived in the three city districts with the highest number of foreign-born inhabitants: Rosengård (622), Södra Innerstaden (315) and Fosie (263).<sup>15</sup>

Table 4 shows that over 70 percent of Somalia-born people arrived in Sweden since 2000 and almost 60 percent since 2006. In Malmö the corresponding figures are about 60 percent and 50 percent; Somalis in Stockholm have spent more time in the country.

**Table 4. Time spent in Sweden by Somalia-born people aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

Period of arrival	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Sweden
Up to 1990	4	3	7	2
1991–2000	43	34	31	25
2001–2005	16	14	13	13
2006–2010	35	47	48	59
Unknown	2	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Statistics Sweden

Somalis in Sweden constitute a young population. In all Sweden, about 75 percent of Somalis over the age of 16 are less than 40 years old. The age distribution does not differ very much between the larger cities, as can be seen from Table 5.

<sup>13</sup> “Varför söker somalier asyl i Sverige?” (Why do Somalis apply for asylum in Sweden?), Swedish Migration Board, 6 March 2013, at [migrationsverket.se/info/4358.html](http://migrationsverket.se/info/4358.html) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>14</sup> B. Carlsson et al., *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden*, pp. 25, 62; see also [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalis\\_in\\_the\\_Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalis_in_the_Netherlands) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>15</sup> See [www.malmö.se/download/18.6e1be7ef13514d6cfcc800030803/1383648023372/Nr.+2+F%C3%B6delsel%C3%A4nder+per+stadsdel.xls](http://www.malmö.se/download/18.6e1be7ef13514d6cfcc800030803/1383648023372/Nr.+2+F%C3%B6delsel%C3%A4nder+per+stadsdel.xls) (accessed 11 November 2013).

**Table 5. Age distribution of Somalia-born people aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

Age	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Sweden
16–19	9	8	8	12
20–29	33	35	36	37
30–39	28	30	25	27
40–49	21	19	21	17
50–59	8	6	8	6
60–64	2	1	2	2
Total	101	99	100	101

**Note:** Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

**Source:** Statistics Sweden

The majority of Somalis are married, as seen in Table 6. Divorces are somewhat more frequent in Stockholm compared with the other cities and the country as a whole. In Malmö a comparatively high proportion is not married.

**Table 6. Marital status of Somalia-born people aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Sweden
Married	53	56	54	59
Not married	24	23	28	24
Divorced	21	19	17	15
Widow(er)	2	2	2	2
Total	100	100	101	100

**Note:** Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

**Source:** Statistics Sweden

The majority of Somalis have no children. This may reflect the age profile of the population: about half (over the age of 16) are less than 30 years of age. At the same time it is commonly held that Somalis have large families. As can be seen from Table 7, about 20 percent of Somalis have four or more children.

**Table 7. Number of children of Somalia-born aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Sweden
None	49	53	55	53
One	10	11	10	10
Two	10	8	7	8
Three	7	7	9	7
Four and more	23	21	19	21
Total	99	100	100	99

Note: Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

Source: Statistics Sweden

### 2.3 Somalis and Islam in Sweden

With 57,873 people born in Somalia or born in Sweden from two Somali-born parents, Somalis now form the fourth-biggest group of Muslims in Sweden, after Iraqis, Muslims from the Balkans and Iranians.<sup>16</sup> Somali practising Muslims face the same challenges as other Muslims in Sweden and thus they are not singled out as a group in the literature on Islam in Sweden.

In 1930, 15 Muslims were registered in Sweden. As this was the last time religious affiliation was registered all subsequent numbers are estimations. In 1953 there were approximately 500 Muslims, in 1970 9,000, in 1980, 30,000, in 1990, 250,000 and in 2010 350,000–400,000. Islam is thus a relatively new religion in Sweden and the Muslim population did not get any attention until the second half of the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

With labour immigration in the 1960s until the oil crisis in 1973 most Muslims came from Turkey, Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries. Labour immigration was then replaced by refugee immigration. Various international crises have therefore constantly changed the composition of the Muslim population in Sweden. During the 1970s refugees came from the civil war in Lebanon and Palestine. In the 1980s Iranian and Iraqi refugees came escaping the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iran–Iraq war.

<sup>16</sup> This admittedly crude estimation is based on Statistic Sweden's numbers for the end of 2011. The corresponding number for Iraqis was 166,237, former Yugoslavs and Bosnians 169,066 and Iranians 80,663. As many refugees from Iraq belong to religious minorities (Christians, Mandaeans and Yazidis) and many from the Balkans are Christians it is impossible to give an exact number of Iraqi and Balkan Muslims in Sweden, but it is reasonable to suppose that they outnumber Somali Muslims.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Cato, *När islam blev svenskt: Föreställningar om islam och muslimer i svensk offentlig politik 1975–2010* (When Islam Became Swedish: Perceptions of Muslims in Swedish Public Policy 1975–2010), Lund University, 2012.

More Iraqi refugees came during the two Gulf wars in 1991 and 2003. Afghans have come since the Soviet occupation in the 1970s, the civil war following the Soviet withdrawal, Taliban rule and the American invasion. At present, the two largest groups arriving are Somalis and Syrians. This means that Sweden has a heterogeneous Muslim population in comparison with several other European countries where specific ethnic groups tend to dominate (North Africans in France, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium; Turks in Germany, South Asians in the UK). The Muslim population is predominantly Sunni but there is a large Shi'a group, mainly from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. Only a minority of the Muslim population seems to be religiously active and practising. According to the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities those Islamic congregations that received state grants in 2010 had together 110,000 members.<sup>18</sup>

The first purpose-built mosque in Sweden was built by the Ahmadiyya community in Gothenburg in 1976.<sup>19</sup> The first non-Ahmadi purpose-built mosque was built in Malmö in 1984 by a group that mainly came from the Balkans. However, its staff and users today belong to several ethnicities. In 2000 a purpose-built mosque was inaugurated in central Stockholm and there are today at least four other purpose-built mosques in Sweden and plans for several more. However, most Islamic congregations are located in apartments or closed factories. In an inventory of mosques in 2008, the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University found around 24 Islamic congregations in Malmö and its twin city Lund, the vast majority in the former.<sup>20</sup> In 2006 researchers from Gothenburg University found 15 Islamic congregations there.<sup>21</sup>

A Swedish law from 1937 bans animal slaughter without stunning. This affects both Jews and Muslims because many religious scholars consider a stunned animal as harmed before slaughter and hence its meat ritually impure. However, there are

<sup>18</sup> Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities, "Statistik 2012" (Statistics 2012), 2012, at [www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistik2010.4.59d35f60133a8327d79800011925.html](http://www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistik2010.4.59d35f60133a8327d79800011925.html) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Ahmadiyya is an Islamic movement founded in South Asia in the late 19th century. They are often accused by other Muslims of venerating the founder Ahmad al-Qadiani as a prophet and therefore rejected as heretics.

<sup>20</sup> E. L. Lundqvist and L. Stenberg, "Muslimska föreningar i Malmö och Lund – en ögonblicksbild" (Muslim Associations in Malmö and Lund – a Snapshot), 2009, first published at [islamologi.se](http://islamologi.se) but no longer accessible online; English version divided in three parts on Spyros Sofos' blog, "Exploring Muslim Identities in Europe", Part 1, 10 December 2010 <http://european-muslims.blogspot.se/2010/12/muslim-associations-in-malmo-and-lund.html>, part 2, 11 December 2010 at <http://european-muslims.blogspot.se/2010/12/muslim-associations-in-malmo-and-lund.html>, part 3 January 5 2011 at <http://european-muslims.blogspot.se/2011/01/muslim-associations-in-malmo-and-lund.html> (all accessed 11 November 2013). Lundqvist and Stenberg initially found 56 registered associations with names including "Islamic" and "Muslim" in the Malmö-Lund area but managed to contact only 24 of them.

<sup>21</sup> *Världsreligioner i Göteborg – Guide till föreningar* (World Religions in Gothenburg – Guide to Associations), Gothenburg city, 2006 (hereafter, *Världsreligioner i Göteborg*).



different attitudes on how to observe Islamic dietary rules. Some practising Muslims satisfy themselves by avoiding pork. Others accept halal meat produced in Sweden, which means that the animal is slaughtered according to Swedish regulations but blessed by an imam before being slaughtered. Those who do not accept this compromise have to rely on imported meat. This is, however, largely available and especially in the big cities there is no shortage of halal meat. It is often not considered a problem to observe Islamic dietary rules in schools. There are almost always vegetarian alternatives and schools with many Muslim pupils often only serve halal meat. Demands for gender-separate swimming lessons in school may sometimes be understood as more controversial, but schools tend to try to solve that pragmatically by negotiating a solution.<sup>22</sup>

The wearing of head scarves is considered as a fundamental part of religious freedom. The right to wear it in schools is uncontested and employers who deny women employment on the grounds that they are wearing a head scarf risk being charged with discrimination. The full face veil is a more delicate question. A directive from the National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) in 2003 laid the responsibility on the principal of each school to decide whether to allow it or not. In 2012 a new directive laid the responsibility on the individual teacher. It is the very possibility of identifying the full-face veil as a religious symbol that makes banning it problematic, but for practical reasons, such as difficulties identifying women wearing it, schools are allowed to ban it.<sup>23</sup>

Several studies report that their Somali informants, especially women, claim that religion has become more important for them since arriving in Sweden. At the same time religion becomes more problematic. Already internal urbanisation processes result in people from different places living next to each other. Hence local religious traditions are exposed to rival ones, a process Eickelman and Piscatori has called objectification,<sup>24</sup> begging the question what the true religious teachings are. This process is even more intensified with migration to other continents where Muslims

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<sup>22</sup> R. Lagervall, "Representations of Religion in Secular States: The Muslim Community in Sweden", *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, forthcoming (hereafter, Lagervall, "Representations of Religion in Secular States"). For a case study of the negotiations between the staff and Muslim parents in a public school, as well as the working of an independent Islamic school, see K. Gustavsson, *Muslimsk skola, svenska villkor: konflikt, identitet och förhandling* (Muslim School, Swedish Conditions: Conflict, Identity and Negotiation), Boréa Publishing, Umeå, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Lagervall, "Representations of Religion in Secular States".

<sup>24</sup> D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996, pp. 38ff.

find themselves in a minority. Religious persons, especially Muslims, regularly find themselves expected to represent and defend their religion.<sup>25</sup>

In a country like Sweden, where even devout Christians are looked at with suspicion or consternation, Muslim migrants have come to symbolize the persistence of religious people in a secular society. To this should be added the fact that Somalis are a minority within the larger and rather diverse Muslim population. This situation gives rise to various responses, from identifying with a national Somali Shafi'i tradition to a search for an authentic and universal form of Islam that is purified from local traditions. This may be manifested in adopting globalised Islamic dress codes, such as women wearing the head scarf or, among those who adopt a global Salafi ideology, women adopting the niqab (full-face veil) and men growing a beard and adopting Salafi male dress. Widespread literacy and modern communication technologies offer more people opportunity to explore religious sources by themselves or to find religious authorities whose interpretations they trust. This results in new distinctions between what can be rejected as only culture and what is perceived as authentic religion. Religion may serve both to justify conservative values concerning women's proper position and to challenge them. Somali women may criticise their husbands for not living up to Islamic ideals and challenge female genital mutilation on religious grounds, either altogether or only the most radical surgical operations.<sup>26</sup>

A survey from 2009 interviewed 102 imams in Sweden. Of these, three were educated in Somalia. It is of course not unlikely that Somalia-born imams are educated in other countries but it can be noted that only nine of the imams interviewed were educated in Saudi Arabia.<sup>27</sup> This may be taken as an indication that Somalis tend to attend mosques together with other Muslim groups.

However, according to a guide to Islamic congregations published by Gothenburg city in 2006, there was a congregation in that city called the Somali Cultural Association which, according to itself, had over 300 active members. It does not have an employed imam but a layman skilled in recitation of the Koran who leads the prayer and gives

<sup>25</sup> See J. Otterbeck, *Samtidisislam. Unga muslimer i Malmö och Köpenhamn* (Contemporary Islam. Young Muslims in Malmö and Copenhagen), Carlssons, Stockholm, 2010; J. Otterbeck, "Constructing a Respectable Islam in Malmö and Copenhagen", in *Religion and Identity Politics*, O. Hammer (ed.), Brill, Leiden, forthcoming.

<sup>26</sup> S. Johnsdotter, *Created by God: How Somalis in Swedish Exile Reassess the Practice of Female Circumcision*. Lund: Lund University, Lund Monographs in Social Anthropology No. 10, 2002, pp. 45, 132ff. (hereafter, Johnsdotter, *Created by God*).

<sup>27</sup> E. Amnå, P. Brundin and G. Larsson, Staten och imamerna. Religion, integration, autonomi: Betänkande från imamutbildningsutredningen (The State and the Imams: Religion, Integration, and Autonomy. Report from the Imam Education Commission), SOU (Swedish Government Official Reports), 2009, p. 52, at [regeringen.se/sb/d/11358/a/127317](http://regeringen.se/sb/d/11358/a/127317) (accessed 11 November 2013). The greatest number, 47, were educated in Turkey, probably a result of the Turkish state policy to send state-salaried imams to European countries. The imams interviewed estimated the total number of imams in Sweden to be between 250 and 300.

Koranic courses to children.<sup>28</sup> The biggest Salafi mosque in Gothenburg, with 5,000 registered members from 30 different ethnic groups, is dominated by Somalis and Somali is the dominating language.<sup>29</sup> The big purpose-built mosque in the same city has a Somali imam.<sup>30</sup> In Gothenburg members of the Somali community also seem to have played a key role in establishing an Islamic independent school in 1998.<sup>31</sup> The Somali-born Abdirisak Waberi was the principal of the school from its creation in 1998 to 2011 when he became a Member of Parliament (MP) for the Conservative Party. He was also president of the Islamic Association in Sweden, one of the Islamic umbrella organisations, between 2009 and 2011.<sup>32</sup> However, neither in his earlier capacity as a Muslim spokesperson nor as an MP has he presented himself as a representative of the Somali population. In the Stockholm suburb Rinkeby the Islamic Cultural Centre and Islamic Somali Cultural Centre are dominated by Somalis. In the city Örebro the Örebro Mosque Foundation also has Somali dominance.

The Swedish Security Service (*Säkerhetspolisen*) has expressed concern about individuals who travel from Sweden for military training and combat among Islamist groups in conflict areas such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen and, more recently, Syria.<sup>33</sup> In February 2012 the Security Service estimated that around 30 Swedes had travelled to Somalia.<sup>34</sup> These travels seem to be a result of a conscious recruitment strategy among Somalis in the diaspora that began after the Ethiopian invasion of the country in 2006. These recruitment efforts appear to have been particularly active in the Salafi mosque in Gothenburg mentioned above. One of the most well-known web pages proselytising for al-Shabaab, Alqimmah.net, was based there and some

<sup>28</sup> *Världsreligioner i Göteborg*, p. 21; see also [islamguiden.com/ovrigt/islam\\_guide.pdf](http://islamguiden.com/ovrigt/islam_guide.pdf) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>29</sup> *Världsreligioner i Göteborg*, p. 22. This mosque was still active in 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Email communication with Göran Larsson, professor of religious studies at University of Gothenburg, 1 September 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Open Society Institute, *Muslims in the EU: Cities Report*. Preliminary research report and literature survey. Sweden, Open Society Institute – EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme, 2007, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> This organisation runs the Stockholm Mosque, a purpose-built mosque in central Stockholm inaugurated in 2000, a fact which makes the organisation appear as the public face of Islam in Sweden. It should be noted that the organisation does not have any Somali or other ethnic profile.

<sup>33</sup> *SÄPOs årsbok 2012* (Yearbook of the Swedish Security Service 2012), Stockholm, 2013, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> E. Stenberg, “Säpo bevakar terrortränade svenskar” (Swedish Security Service Watches Terror-trained Swedes), *Dagens Nyheter*, 27 February 2012, at [dn.se/nyheter/sverige/sapo-bevakar-terrortrnade-svenskar](http://dn.se/nyheter/sverige/sapo-bevakar-terrortrnade-svenskar) (accessed 11 November 2013).

individuals who led these efforts subsequently moved to Somalia themselves where they took up leading positions in al-Shabaab and al-Hizb al-Islami.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.4 Swedish Perceptions of Somalis in Swedish Society

This section begins with a description of the populist party, the Sweden Democrats, because, though the party is ostracized by the other political parties in Parliament and described as extremist in the media, its presence on the political scene has affected the public debate on immigration and Islam in Sweden. After a brief overview of the party's history, some examples of its representatives' statements on Somalis will be given, followed by a debate on Somalis between journalists who belong to the party's opponents, and finally a scholarly debate between Swedish anthropologists on the sensitive issue of the existence of female genital mutilation among Somalis in Sweden.

In the parliamentary elections in 2010 the far-right populist party the Sweden Democrats gained 5.7 percent of the votes and for the first time entered the Parliament with 20 seats out of 349. This was the result of a long process of transforming the party into a more respectable shape that could attract a sizeable number of voters. The party was formed in 1988 by members of the neo-Nazi movement Preserve Sweden Swedish (*Bevara Sverige Svenskt*, BSS). In 1992 Anders Klarström, a former member of the Nordic Reich Party, a Nazi party founded in 1956, was elected as party leader. In the 1990s the Sweden Democrats opposed the mixture of races and uniforms, bomber jackets and anti-Semitic slogans that were not uncommon in its demonstrations. In 1995 Mikael Jansson was elected as leader and he began the transformation process by introducing a ban on uniforms. In 2005 Jimmy Åkesson (born in 1979) was elected as leader and members of his circle of friends from his university years in Lund in southern Sweden were elected to other important posts. Under the new leadership the transformation of the party intensified, symbolically manifested with changing the party symbol from a torch to a less militant blue anemone. Judging from the polls it is not unlikely that the party will increase its votes to around 10 percent in the next election in 2014.<sup>36</sup> Even though the party holds the balance of power in the Parliament, the other parties refuse to negotiate with it in order not to give it legitimacy. The word "opposition" in Swedish political vocabulary is reserved for the Social Democrats, the Green Party and the Leftist Party, and the Sweden Democrats is

<sup>35</sup> M. Ranstorp and P. Hyllengren, *Förebyggande av våldsbejakande extremism i tredje land* (Prevention of Violent Extremism in Third Countries), Centre for Assymetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish Defence School, Stockholm, 2013, 50, pp. 124ff. See also M. Sandelin, "Jihad-resenärerna" (The Jihad Travellers), *Expo – Demokratisk tidskrift* 2 (2013), pp. 20–31.

<sup>36</sup> For the Sweden Democrats' history see P. Mattson, *Sverigedemokraterna in på bara skinnet* (Sweden Democrats to the Skin), Natur & Kultur, Stockholm, 2009. For an analysis of the rather confused way the political establishment handled the emergence of the Sweden Democrats onto the political scene, see A. Hellström, *Vi är de goda: Den offentliga debatten om Sverigedemokraterna och deras politik* (We Are the Good Ones: The Public Debate on the Sweden Democrats and Their Policy), Tenkekraft Förlag, Hägersten, 2010.

considered as a third force on its own. Thus political bargaining takes place between the centre-right government and one or several opposition parties but excludes the Sweden Democrats.

The party's core demand is a radical transformation of Swedish immigration policy and the minimisation of immigration from "culturally distant countries". It also advocates bans on the import of ritually slaughtered meat (that is, halal and kosher) and on religious buildings that are "foreign to the Swedish architectural tradition".<sup>37</sup> Already in 1999 the party abolished its demand to repatriate most non-European immigrants, replacing it with a demand that immigrants should assimilate. By using the word "assimilation" the party distances itself from the official policy of integration which is based on the premise that newcomers can become good Swedish citizens and at the same time preserve their cultural and religious identities. The party's assimilationist ideal also means that in principle it accepts that non-European immigrants can become Swedish if they adopt what the party considers to be Swedish culture and values. The party is, however, especially suspicious of Muslims because it considers Islam as a religion based on laws that are inherently incompatible with secular democracy and equality between men and women. It also tends to regard culture and religion as phenomena with a very strong causal impact on people's thought and behaviour. Somalis are not singled out in the official documents of the party and the official party discourse focuses on culture and tradition rather than race. Indeed, the leadership has introduced a policy of zero tolerance for racist remarks, which has resulted in a number of expulsions of party representatives. However, individual representatives of the party occasionally refer to race and even Åkesson sometimes implies that the African culture of Somalis may be a factor that in addition to their Islamic belief may render their adaptation to Swedish society more difficult. This may be exemplified by the events in Forserum.

In August 2012 it was widely reported in the media that Somalis in Forserum, a village with 2,000 inhabitants, had been harassed for weeks by a small band of young men and that many already had moved from the town. Somali parents kept their children home from school and the local Somali association exhorted Somalis to move out. The local government held a crisis meeting, the mayor participated together with 200 locals in a

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<sup>37</sup> Both expressions are from the immigration policy program published at the party's website 23 August 2010: <http://sverigedemokraternaspartiprogram.wordpress.com/2010/08/23/sverigedemokraterna-invandringpolitiskt-program> (accessed 17 December 2013).

demonstration against racism and the police set up a mobile police station at the square to collect complaints from Somalis.<sup>38</sup>

Åkesson decided to visit the town, despite objections from local politicians, and on the day of his visit one of the national newspapers published an op-ed of him, in which he described the allegations of harassments of Somalis as very serious, affirming that no individual deserved to be the object of harassment, threats or violence. But he denounced depictions of Forserum as a racist society and comparisons with the American South in the 1950s, claiming that the Somalis in Forserum had been assisted with maintenance, housing, education “and even the possibility to have their own place of assembly”. He claimed that the events were a result of the failed integration policy and continuous mass immigration. He went on to describe “the other side of the coin” and related stories he had heard of ethnic Swedes being harassed in schools, playgrounds and squares by people of “non-Swedish background” as a result of what he considered exaggerated reports from Forserum.<sup>39</sup> In another op-ed in November the same year, Åkesson once again sounded warnings about the “mass immigration policy”. He especially singled out the “wave of illiterates from Somalia”, and referred to the emergence of ethnic enclaves such as “Little Mogadishu and Baghdad Town”.<sup>40</sup>

Sven-Erik Karlsson, a Sweden Democrats politician in another town, reacted on the comments field at the website Avpixlat with the remark that “Such a gang that stirs things up should exist in all Sweden’s 290 municipalities”. He was rebuked by the party leadership for that comment and left the party.<sup>41</sup> However, not only local

<sup>38</sup> “Somalier uppmanas att flytta” (Somalis Exhorted to Move), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 August 2012, at [svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/somalier-uppmanas-att-flytta\\_7439266.svd](http://svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/somalier-uppmanas-att-flytta_7439266.svd) (accessed 11 November 2013); F. Norman, “Skolbarn i Nässjö hemma efter hot” (Schoolchildren in Nässjö Stay at Home after Threats), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 August 2012 at [svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/skolbarn-i-nassjo-hemma-efter-hot\\_7440636.svd](http://svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/skolbarn-i-nassjo-hemma-efter-hot_7440636.svd) (accessed 11 November 2013); F. Nilsson, “Krismöte efter hot mot somalier” (Crisis Meeting after Threats Against Somalis), *Dagens Nyheter*, 22 August 2012, at [dn.se/nyheter/sverige/krismot-efter-hot-mot-somalier](http://dn.se/nyheter/sverige/krismot-efter-hot-mot-somalier) (accessed 11 November 2013); “Hundratals i fackeltåg i Forserum” (Hundreds in Demonstration in Forserum), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 August 2012, at [svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/hundratals-i-fackeltag-i-forserum\\_7445396.svd](http://svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/hundratals-i-fackeltag-i-forserum_7445396.svd) (accessed 11 November 2013); “Mobil polisstation i Forserum” (Mobile Police Station in Forserum), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 29 August 2012, at [svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/mobil-polisstation-i-forserum\\_7456878.svd](http://svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/mobil-polisstation-i-forserum_7456878.svd) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>39</sup> J. Åkesson, “Därför besöker jag Forserum idag” (Why I Visit Forserum Today), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 4 September 2012, at [svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/darfor-besoker-jag-forserum-idag\\_7471496.svd](http://svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/darfor-besoker-jag-forserum-idag_7471496.svd) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>40</sup> J. Åkesson, “Vi har politiken som bryter utanförskapet” (We Have the Policy Which Breaks Exclusion), *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 November 2012, at [dn.se/debatt/vi-har-politiken-som-bryter-utanforskapet](http://dn.se/debatt/vi-har-politiken-som-bryter-utanforskapet) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>41</sup> A. Rolfer, “SD-politiker: Fler borde trakassera somalier” (Sweden Democrat Politician: More People Should Harass Somalis), *Dagens Nyheter*, 24 August 2012, at [dn.se/nyheter/sverige/sd-politiker-fler-borde-trakassera-somalier](http://dn.se/nyheter/sverige/sd-politiker-fler-borde-trakassera-somalier) (accessed 11 November 2013); “Omskriven SD-politiker lämnar partiet” (Controversial Sweden Democrat Politician Leaves the Party), *Svt nyheter*, 27 August 2012, at [svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/smalandsnytt/omskriften-sverigedemokrat-lamnar-partiet](http://svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/smalandsnytt/omskriften-sverigedemokrat-lamnar-partiet) (accessed 11 November 2013).

politicians from the party but also MPs have repeatedly got attention with their racist utterances. The Sweden Democrat MP, Thoralf Petterson, wrote in his blog in July 2012: “For every Somali that gets a residence permit in Sweden the financial flow from Sweden to the terror organisation al-Shabaab increases and the quantity of the drug khat that is taken into Sweden increases exponentially.”<sup>42</sup>

The party’s most outspoken critic of Islam, the MP Kent Ekeröth, had a specific tag called “Somalis” on his blog to mark the posts in which he warns of the incapacity of Somalis to adapt to Swedish culture and society. In one such post he concluded: “They lie in order to exploit the system, they have nothing here to do. Instead of reuniting here in Sweden they can reunite in Somalia – it has obviously worked for their ‘close families’ to live there – why not go back home then?”<sup>43</sup> The post was written as a comment to a post on Avpixlat with the headline “Katrineholm protests against mass invasion of Somalis” which related estimations of the mayor in Katrineholm that the municipality would receive 400 Somalis as a result of lightened restrictions for immigrants so that they could live with close family members. Another post at the same site told a similar story from another city under the headline “Borlänge mobilizes for Somali mass invasion”.<sup>44</sup>

There are of course a number of other anti-immigration sites with thousands of unique visits. The significance of Avpixlat is its close links to the Sweden Democrats. Although both the party and the site are eager to deny any official connection, the site is financed by Ekeröth and the message presented there is loyal to the party line. However, this unofficial link makes it possible for Avpixlat to present a harsher rhetoric on immigrants and Muslims, Somalis included, and for the party leadership to distance itself from it, although often in ambiguous terms. The site thus appears as the more unpolished face of the party. The very name Avpixlat means “unpixelled”, referring to its habit of naming and publishing unpixelled photos of non-ethnic Swedes suspected of crimes, in contrast to mainstream media which usually only names persons and refers to their ethnicity or religion when it is deemed to be relevant and of public

<sup>42</sup> “SD-riksdagsman polisanmäls för hets mot somalier” (Sweden Democrat MP Reported to Police for Incitement Against Somalis), *24 nyheter*, 18 July 2012, at [nyheter24.se/nyheter/politik/719849-sd-riksdagsman-anmalls-for-hets-mot-somalier](http://nyheter24.se/nyheter/politik/719849-sd-riksdagsman-anmalls-for-hets-mot-somalier) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>43</sup> “Invandringen en fantastisk tillgång” (Immigration a Tremendous Resource), 17 November 2011, at [kentekeroth.se/tag/katrineholm](http://kentekeroth.se/tag/katrineholm). The post has since been removed, as has the tag “Somalis”. The post is however quoted in Expo, “Somalier utsätts för hatpropaganda” (Somalis exposed to Hate Propaganda), 23 August 2012, at [http://expo.se/2012/somalier-utsatts-for-hatpropaganda\\_5250.html](http://expo.se/2012/somalier-utsatts-for-hatpropaganda_5250.html) (accessed 29 August 2013).

<sup>44</sup> “Katrineholm protesterar mot massinvasion av somalier” (Katrineholm Mobilises Against Mass Invasion of Somalis), Avpixlat, 6 November 2011, at [avpixlat.info/2011/11/16/katrineholm-protesterar-mot-massinvasion-av-somalier](http://avpixlat.info/2011/11/16/katrineholm-protesterar-mot-massinvasion-av-somalier) (accessed 11 November 2013); “Borlänge mobiliserar för somalisk massinvasion” (Borlänge Mobilises for Somali Mass Invasion), Avpixlat, 9 November 2011, at [avpixlat.info/2011/11/09/borlange-mobiliserar-for-somalisk-massinvasion](http://avpixlat.info/2011/11/09/borlange-mobiliserar-for-somalisk-massinvasion) (accessed 11 November 2013).

interest. Asked by a journalist on the expression “mass invasion of Somalis” to Katrineholm in the post on Avpixlat quoted above, Åkesson answered: “As a politician I would not express myself in that way. But I don’t want to review other publishers’ choice of words.”<sup>45</sup>

In another post Avpixlat described an information meeting for teachers in Gothenburg, in which the lecturer said:

Somalis are a nomadic people. They have loyalty to their clan and ethnic group. They do not feel any loyalty towards authorities or a nation (as is widely known Somalia is not a functioning state). The clan is more important than anything and all Somali life circulates around the clan and the relations within the clan (and as an extension the relations between clans). It is a ‘relational’ culture. In Sweden this means that Somalis do not identify with the country Sweden, the state, or the Swedish culture, but also here with their own group. Different clans have taken up their residence in different places. Here in Gothenburg there are many from the clans Hawiye and Darod.<sup>46</sup>

The lecturer was Per Brinkemo, a journalist who for years has worked with a Somali association in Malmö. Brinkemo was far from satisfied with the account of what he had said and responded angrily in the comment field, calling the anonymous author stupid. He asked the author: “But if you care for the welfare state, if you care for the Fatherland Sweden, is the solution then to in bad faith distort information from people who try to understand what happens in the country?” He then declared that he was very proud of Sweden and that he loved his country, culture and history.

Thus the presence of the Sweden Democrats in Swedish politics influences the public debate on immigration and integration, despite them being ostracised by the other established political parties. In a critical comment on Åkesson’s op-ed quoted above, in which he described Somalis as illiterates, the journalist Martin Aagård referred to statistics indicating that 85 percent of Somalis in Sweden have primary or higher education and argued that the categorisation of the remaining 15 percent as “unknown” did not necessarily indicate illiteracy but could just as well indicate lack of documentation of their education.<sup>47</sup> Brinkemo responded by reversing Aagård’s argument, claiming that the category “primary education” did not exclude illiteracy in

<sup>45</sup> N. Orrenius, “Åkesson: Reinfeldt feg och föraktfull” (Åkesson: Reinfeldt a Coward and Contemptuous), *Sydsvenskan*, 22 November 2011, at [sydsvenskan.se/sverige/akesson-slar-ifransig-kritik](http://sydsvenskan.se/sverige/akesson-slar-ifransig-kritik) (accessed 19 December 2013). Fredrik Reinfeldt is the prime minister of Sweden.

<sup>46</sup> “Migrationsverket informerar inför den förestående somaliska anstormingen” (Swedish Migration Board Informs in the Wake of the Somali Assault), Avpixlat, 19 October 2012, at [avpixlat.info/2012/10/19/migrationsverket-informerar-infor-den-forestaende-somaliska-anstormningen](http://avpixlat.info/2012/10/19/migrationsverket-informerar-infor-den-forestaende-somaliska-anstormningen) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>47</sup> M. Aagård, “DN låter gladeligen Åkesson sprida lögnen” (DN Happily Lets Åkesson Spread Lies), *Aftonbladet*, 6 November 2012, at [aftonbladet.se/kultur/article15728777.ab](http://aftonbladet.se/kultur/article15728777.ab) (accessed 11 November 2013).



the Somali context but could mean everything from illiteracy to one, two, three or nine years' education, because the Somali educational system had already collapsed in the 1980s. He concluded with the exhortation: "I just want to say, don't care for the Sweden Democrats, see the reality. Only this way will it be possible to find tools to manage the real challenges the country Sweden is facing." Aagård responded by accusing Brinkemo of defending the Sweden Democrats, based on Brinkemo's statement on the low educational level of Somalis and also referring to his use of the word "fatherland" in the lecture noted above. The Swedish word translated by "fatherland" is "*fosterland*", whose connotations are similar to the German word "*Vaterland*". While this word was in common use in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, it is today almost exclusively used by the far right. Brinkemo's use of it was probably intended as a rhetorical device to influence the nationalist readership of Avpixlat by using its own vocabulary.<sup>48</sup>

This is just one example of how the discourse of the Sweden Democrats and the even harsher discourse of anti-immigration sites such as Avpixlat make a sober discussion on the problems connected with immigrant groups difficult. The mention of clan structures, educational levels and female genital mutilation runs the risk of being kidnapped and integrated into xenophobic descriptions of a stable and unchangeable Somali culture that governs all Somali individuals' behaviour.

Another example of a debate on Somalis in which the participants were dedicated anti-racist is from Gothenburg in 2012. Gun Holmertz, a member of the Leftist Party and active in the voluntary aid organisation Caritas in the Gothenburg suburb Hjällbo, published an op-ed in Gothenburg's biggest newspaper in which she complained of increasing manifestations of Islamic extremism in a Somali association, which had its office in the same building as Caritas. The examples of extremism that she referred to were the increasing number of women donning the veil (both head scarf and full-face veil) and of men adopting Salafi dress and growing beards. She also complained that the Somali association was being used as a downright mosque 24 hours a day. She expressed fears that this would obstruct the integration of newly arrived Somalis: "The Somali figurehead for the emancipation of the Somali woman Aayan Hirsi Ali has summarised the dilemma of her compatriots in the West: none of us had been citizens in the modern sense before. We had never felt any participation in and loyalty to any state. We continued to be loyal only towards the clan. Loyalty towards a clan or a religious group instead of towards society is a destructive concept for integration, which the development in Hjällbo demonstrates."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> P. Brinkemo, "Strunta i SD – se verkligheten" (Don't Care For the Sweden Democrats – See Reality); M. Aagård, "Hemslöjd viktigare än svenska tycker SD" (Domestic Arts More Important than Swedish Language Thinks the Sweden Democrats), both in *Aftonbladet*, 13 November 2012, at [aftonbladet.se/kultur/article15769292.ab](http://aftonbladet.se/kultur/article15769292.ab) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>49</sup> G. Holmertz, "Islamismen får allt större fäste i Hjällbo" (Islamism Strengthens its Grip in Hjällbo), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 18 June 2012, at [gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.978928-islamismen-far-allt-storre-faste-i-hjallbo](http://gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.978928-islamismen-far-allt-storre-faste-i-hjallbo) (accessed 11 November 2013).

Göran Larsson and Simon Sorgenfrei, two historians of religion at Gothenburg University, responded by criticising her for reducing social problems to a question of religion and Islamism, noting that neither wearing a headscarf or a beard nor airing prayer carpets is against the law.<sup>50</sup> The head of the Somali association that Holmertz had accused answered that the problem was rather that the Somali population in the suburb had no access to places of assembly. Larsson and Sorgenfrei noted that Caritas is part of the Catholic Church and hence just as religious as the Somali organisation. They also claimed that Aayan Hirsi Ali is controversial and had recently been accused of diminishing the terror attack by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway by describing it as understandable.<sup>51</sup> A former head of the immigrant administration of the city defended Holmertz, lauding her for her track record of social work and warned of the risk that social marginalisation may be exploited by religious extremists.<sup>52</sup>

An earlier example was a discussion about female genital mutilation (FGM). The social anthropologist Sara Johnsdotter claims that there is no evidence of any circumcision of Somali Swedish girls, neither in Sweden nor in Somalia.<sup>53</sup> In a response to a scholarly article which argued that the intervention by Swedish authorities had resulted in the silencing and stigmatisation of FGM rather than its abolition, Johnsdotter and Birgitta Essén wrote in their turn that there were reasons to believe that the practice had in fact generally been abandoned. As none of the other researchers' informants had admitted having their daughters circumcised, Johnsdotter and Essén argued that the idea that the practice persists among Somalis in Sweden is based upon an essentialist notion of African culture as unchanging.<sup>54</sup>

In 2006 the first two convictions for having taken girls from Sweden to circumcise them in Somalia were pronounced. In an analysis of one of the cases Johnsdotter

<sup>50</sup> G. Larsson and S. Sorgenfrei, "Onyanserad kritik av läget i Hjällbo" (Superficial Criticism of the Situation in Hjällbo), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 24 June 2012, at [gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.984355-onyanserad-kritik-av-laget-i-hjallbo](http://gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.984355-onyanserad-kritik-av-laget-i-hjallbo) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>51</sup> A. Aziz and S. Sheikh, "Hjällbos problem är inte aktiva muslimer" (The Problem of Hjällbo is Not Active Muslims), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 24 June 2012, at [gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.984368-hjallbos-problem-ar-inte-aktiva-muslimer](http://gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.984368-hjallbos-problem-ar-inte-aktiva-muslimer) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>52</sup> J. Molin, "Så kan enklaver som Hjällbo bli integrerade" (In This Way Enclaves like Hjällbo Can be Integrated), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 8 August 2012, at [gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.1027792-sa-kan-enklaver-som-hjallbo-bli-integrerade](http://gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.1027792-sa-kan-enklaver-som-hjallbo-bli-integrerade) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Apart from the articles cited below, see also S. Johnsdotter, *Created by God*; and S. Johnsdotter, *FGM in Sweden. Swedish legislation regarding "female genital mutilation" and implementation of the law*, Department of Sociology, Lund University, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> B. M. Ahlberg, I. Krantz, G. Lindmark and M. Warsame, "It's only tradition': making sense of eradication interventions and persistence of female 'circumcision' within a Swedish context", *Critical Social Policy* 24 (1) (2004), pp. 50–78. S. Johnsdotter and B. Essén, "It is only tradition: making sense of Swedish Somalis' narratives of female circumcision and avoiding submission to hegemonic political discourse", *Critical Social Policy*, 25 (4) (2005), p. 584; B. M. Ahlberg, I. Krantz, G. Lindmark and M. Warsame, "A reply to Johnsdotter and Essén", *Critical Social Policy* 25 (4) (2005), pp. 590–595.

argued for the innocence of the man in question. She claimed that the legislation was implemented in a politicised way and that the court did not understand Somali culture but was influenced by what she described as radical feminist assumptions which present men as the sole agents upholding patriarchal structures.<sup>55</sup> In a radio interview in 2013, Johnsdotter argued that the term FGM covers various practices ranging from infibulation to pricking and piercing. She asked why changing female genitals for non-medical reasons was considered especially problematic when practised by Africans and pointed to the fact that piercing and cosmetic surgical operations on the genitals are legal when practised by ethnic Swedish women.<sup>56</sup> A Somali Swedish woman, who had been circumcised in Somalia at the age of seven, accused her of trivialising FGM.<sup>57</sup>

In 2006 Nyamko Sabuni, then an MP for the Liberal Party and later minister of integration, proposed general gynaecological examinations of high-school girls in order to discover FGM.<sup>58</sup> According to the proposal all girls would be examined and not only specific ethnic groups, but many Somalis felt exposed. Even though the proposal was never implemented, there have been reports of girls of Somali background being forced to undergo examinations without their parents being notified.<sup>59</sup>

## 2.5 Summary

In 2011, there were 1,551 Somalia-born individuals in Malmö of which 77 percent lived in three city districts. Half of the Somalis in Malmö arrived in Sweden after 2005. Somalis in Malmö and Sweden constitute a young population in which a majority is married, but more than 50 percent have no children.

Sweden has a very heterogeneous Muslim population, resulting from half a century of immigration from all parts of the world. The number of Muslims is estimated at

<sup>55</sup> S. Johnsdotter, "Popular Notions of FGM in Sweden: The Case of Ali Elmi", *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity and Migration* 3 (2) (2008), pp. 74–82. Johnsdotter also published a book in Swedish on the case, *Ali och den svenska rättvisan: Det första könsstympningsmålet* (Ali and the Swedish Justice. The First Genital Mutilation Case), Égalité, Malmö, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> The interview was broadcast on 3 July 2013 in a series called "Bildningsbyrån-6", at [ur.se/Produkter/176271-Bildningsbyran-sex-Att-skara-i-det-allra-kansligaste?q=johnsdotter](http://ur.se/Produkter/176271-Bildningsbyran-sex-Att-skara-i-det-allra-kansligaste?q=johnsdotter) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>57</sup> K. Seerar, "Könsstympning är alltid ett övergrepp" (Genital Mutilation is Always an Assault), *Aftonbladet*, 28 July 2013, at [expressen.se/debatt/konsstympning-ar-alltid-ett-overgrepp](http://expressen.se/debatt/konsstympning-ar-alltid-ett-overgrepp) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>58</sup> N. Sabuni, "Kontrollera underlivet på alla högstadies flickor" (Check the Genitals of All High-school Girls), *Expressen*, 17 July 2006, at [expressen.se/debatt/kontrollera-underlivet-pa-alla-hogstadies-flickor](http://expressen.se/debatt/kontrollera-underlivet-pa-alla-hogstadies-flickor) (accessed 11 November 2013). "High school" (translation of "högstadiet") enrolls pupils at the age of 13–15.

<sup>59</sup> For one such example see "Flicka utsattes för kränkande gynundersökning" (Girl Object of Humiliating Gynaecological Examination), *Svt*, 21 April 2010, at [svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/svtuppland/flicka-utsattes-for-krankande-gynundersokning](http://svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/svtuppland/flicka-utsattes-for-krankande-gynundersokning) (accessed 11 November 2013). The examination showed that the girl had not been circumcised.

350,000 to 400,000. Somalis represent the fourth largest group of Muslims after people from Iraq, the Balkans and Iran. In a secular country like Sweden, where even devout Christians are looked upon with suspicion, Muslims have come to symbolize the persistence of religious people, although only a minority seem to be religiously active.

In 2010, a populist party, the Sweden Democrats, entered the Swedish Parliament. The party, although ostracized by the other political parties, has affected the public debate on immigration and Islam. On the one hand, the party has introduced a policy of zero tolerance for racist remarks. On the other hand, the party leader has sounded warning against the “wave of illiterates from Somalia” and the consequences of ethnic enclaves like “Little Mogadishu”. At a website, Avpixlat, with close links to the party, the rhetoric against immigrants, Muslims and Somalis has been very harsh. Issues like clan structure, educational levels, Islamic extremism and female genital mutilation have also triggered off heated debates among journalists, politicians and academics belonging to the anti-racist and immigrant-friendly camp.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

The Swedish government is organised at central, regional and local levels. Central government authorities of major importance for people's daily lives are the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), the Tax Agency (*Skatteverket*) and the Enforcement Administration (*Kronofogden*). At the regional level the government is represented by county administrative boards (*länsstyrelser*), responsible for (among other things) making agreements with municipalities for the reception of new arrivals, and by the police. At the local level the government is represented by the Social Insurance Agency (*Försäkringskassan*), responsible for allowances and benefits like child and housing allowances, employment-based benefits like the sickness benefit and old-age pensions. At the regional level there are county councils (*landsting*), in this report represented by Skåne Regional Council, organising (among other things) health care. Finally, at the local level, there are municipalities, in this report the City of Malmö, responsible for child care, care of the elderly, education (below college and university level) and welfare benefits. In this section some policies and attitudes from national, regional and city level will be reflected and one subsection will be devoted to anti-discrimination policy.

#### 3.1 National Policy

Sweden has the best integration policy in the world, according to the international Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which classifies policies in more than 30 countries on a scale from zero to 100. The verdict on Sweden is that immigrants “will find that rare combination of a country experienced with immigration and open to their economic potential”.<sup>60</sup> MIPEX's rankings consider such relevant factors as labour market participation, education, political participation and the prevention of discrimination.

Sweden is seen as a showcase for labour market policies, scoring the maximum 100 on the MIPEX index. This exceptional ranking is explained as follows:

A migrant with the right to work and live in the country has the same chances as everyone else in the labour market. From day one in the country, she and her family members can start applying for any job in the private or public sector. She gets her qualifications from abroad recognized. She can then improve her skills through training and study grants. The state encourages her by targeting her specific needs – for example, she can take language courses focused on her profession. Job mentors and trained staff help her assess skills and use public employment services. Once employed, she has the same rights as all workers in the country.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See [mipex.eu/new-way-migrant-perspective](http://mipex.eu/new-way-migrant-perspective) (accessed 6 April 2012).

<sup>61</sup> See [mipex.eu/labour-market-mobility](http://mipex.eu/labour-market-mobility) (accessed 15 March 2012).

The policy may be excellent, but the outcome is not. Much attention has been paid to the fact that the mean time in Sweden for an immigrant to secure employment is seven years. And the figures MIPEX display show a gap between the employment rate of Swedish and foreign-born inhabitants of about 25 percentage points.<sup>62</sup> By contrast the employment gap is only a few percentage points in Canada and in the United States immigrants come out ahead.

Sweden scores the best result on the MIPEX index in employment and education. Its education policies “encourage most students to do their best in a diverse school and society”. In political participation, Sweden scores sixth:<sup>63</sup> “All can vote in local/regional elections and can form or join associations, media and local parties ... In Sweden today, authorities generally consult with civil society when they change policies.” In access to citizenship Sweden ranks second, surpassed only by Portugal: “Sweden has a clear and uncontroversial path to citizenship. Newcomers are entitled to the same citizenship and dual nationality as Swedish-born citizens.” Finally, Sweden holds the third position behind Canada and the United States in anti-discrimination. The Anti-Discrimination Act of 2009 replaced seven different laws with one and four equality bodies with one Equality Ombudsman.<sup>64</sup>

The integration strategy of the Swedish government is laid out in two official documents from recent years, the latest from 2010.<sup>65</sup> The aims of the integration policy decided by Parliament in 2008 concerns equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background. To fulfil these aims the policy focuses on seven strategic areas: an efficient system for the introduction of new arrivals, more people in employment and entrepreneurship, better educational results and equality in school, better language skills and adult education opportunities, an effective fight against discrimination and the development of urban districts with extensive social inclusion and common basic values in a society characterised by increasing diversity. An important section of the document says:

A point of departure when carrying out this policy is that its aim mainly is to be fulfilled through general measures directed to the population as a whole. Any selective measures should be based upon particular individual needs and preconditions, not upon whether a person is born in another country. Selective

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<sup>62</sup> See [mipex.eu/sweden](http://mipex.eu/sweden) (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Norway, Finland, Iceland, The Netherlands and Luxembourg have better scores.

<sup>64</sup> See [mipex.eu/print/234](http://mipex.eu/print/234) (accessed 15 March 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap – redovisning av regeringens strategi för integration* (Empowerment against Exclusion – Accounting for the Government’s Integration Strategy), skr. 2009/10: 233, 2010 (hereafter Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*). A short fact sheet on integration policy is accessible at the government’s home page, at [regeringen.se/sb/d/108/a/148316](http://regeringen.se/sb/d/108/a/148316) (accessed 1 June 2012).

measures directed towards foreign-born as a group must not be taken after the first period of time in Sweden.<sup>66</sup>

According to this document, the government reports it has achieved precisely this: “Measures taken after the first period of time in Sweden have been based upon individual needs and selective measures based upon a person being born abroad have been rooted out.” The Swedish ideology could hardly be stated in clearer terms: integration is about the relation between the state and the individual and any collective identities of a national, ethnic, linguistic, religious or any other kind should not be allowed to interfere with this relationship. Immigrants are not to be treated selectively after an initial period of time of normally two years in Sweden. At the same time the document admits that “integration is no dash but a marathon race”.<sup>67</sup>

The government underlines that an active employment policy is the most important element of a successful integration policy. Therefore, barriers must be removed and thresholds lowered so that new arrivals can enter the labour market. Furthermore, schools offering high-quality education for all youngsters are of the utmost importance to prevent the second generation (immigrants’ children) from becoming outsiders.<sup>68</sup> In addition,

Integration policy has over the last couple of years focused on work, education and language. These are the key factors affecting what happens in a large amount of other areas like health, segregation, exposure to crime, democratic participation and the preconditions for a rich leisure time and participation in cultural life.<sup>69</sup>

Most other integration problems – besides work and education – can consequently be seen as “symptoms of high unemployment, low employment and over-representation of people with low education among foreign-born, especially among those who have just arrived or migrated from countries outside of Europe”.<sup>70</sup>

As a consequence of this focus on work, education and language, a reform to allow the faster introduction of new arrivals was implemented in December 2010. The main features include the state taking on responsibility, via the Public Employment Service, for introductory measures, a responsibility that lay previously with the municipalities. The Employment Service develops a personal introduction plan with the new arrival, based on the individual’s previous education and work experience. This plan includes courses in the Swedish language, civic orientation and employment preparation activities. An introduction guide is appointed to help the new arrival find a job.

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<sup>66</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>68</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*, pp. 5, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Government Offices, *Egenmakt mot utanförskap*, p. 7.

### 3.2 Regional Policy

At the regional level, the county administrative boards and county councils are expected to support and further the national integration policy. The county administrative boards are expected to make agreements with municipalities concerning the reception of refugees. In the region of Skåne, where Malmö is situated, the County Administrative Board has formed a partnership with Skåne Regional Council and municipalities in the region, government authorities, universities (Lund, Malmö) and civil society organisations, which provides a platform for migration and health. The aims are to inform new arrivals about Swedish society and health care in their native language, to include non-profit organisations and to establish a continuous cooperation with researchers. Two of these projects are of particular concern for Somalis (see also sections 5 and 10).

“The partnership is based on the idea that the system must be adapted to people regardless of opinions about ethnic groups,” said Katarina Carlzén, head of the Skåne partnership.<sup>71</sup> “We have a pragmatic attitude. Departing from this basic premise and from knowledge of specific needs among Somalis it has not been controversial to highlight certain things that could be general to this group.”

### 3.3 City Policy

The strategy for the integration of immigrants into the city of Malmö was formulated in 1999:

Some people believe that immigrants to Sweden should adapt to Swedish society, which they regard as normative and unchangeable. We believe that the ethnic diversity of the population will set its stamp on our culture and affect the development of Swedish society, so we must all – in various ways – adapt to new influences and perceptions of identity, cross-cultural lifestyle and movements in which ethnic and social boundaries will be crossed.<sup>72</sup>

The overarching vision is “a city free from fear of strangers, discrimination, xenophobia and racism”. The key word is respect. Differences between people should be seen as “natural and self-evident” at the same time as people must recognise what they have in common. To make this possible, people of different backgrounds must meet more often in their working lives, in the neighbourhood and in voluntary associations, unions and clubs.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Katarina Carlzén, 18 December 2012.

<sup>72</sup> City of Malmö, *Action plan to promote integration in the City of Malmö*, City Office, Malmö, 1999, p. 11, at [Malmö.se/download/18.6e0fe7e512c888cbc52800012689/action%2Bplan%2Benglish.pdf](http://Malmö.se/download/18.6e0fe7e512c888cbc52800012689/action%2Bplan%2Benglish.pdf) (accessed 15 April 2012) (hereafter, City of Malmö, *Action Plan 1999*).

<sup>73</sup> City of Malmö, *Action Plan 1999*, p. 15.



The City of Malmö Integration Council takes a somewhat self-critical attitude: “There is also a lack of awareness and understanding in many municipal agencies and programmes that makes life more difficult for the diverse people of Malmö.” Immigrant groups with special needs – senior citizens, women, young people and people who need rehabilitation are mentioned – must be given support. The municipality also has to set a good example. As an employer, it can create role models for children, youngsters and the unemployed.<sup>74</sup> The strategy assigns a function to immigrant associations:

Immigrant/cultural associations have a significant social function and serve as a gathering place where the native language and culture are kept alive. They can communicate information about Swedish society and therewith function as a bridge in the contacts with various public institutions, such as the schools.<sup>75</sup>

In a plan of action for 2012, framed by the City’s Department for Integration and Labour Market, with a funding of SEK 364 million (approximately €42.2 million), the key words are increased participation and employment. The plan covers initiatives in the labour market, including newly arrived immigrants and refugees when the Public Employment Service is not adequate, adult education including SFI, information for newcomers, equality, integration and anti-discrimination.<sup>76</sup>

To improve social and health conditions in the city, the Municipal Executive Committee of Malmö decided in 2010 to establish a Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, which was given a broad mandate: “The issues which the Commission has to process encompass complex societal matters such as sustainability, segregation, homelessness, inequality, childhood conditions and the labour market.” A description of problem areas in an interim report from the commission captures the situation Somalis in Malmö face: “Low income, unemployment, low education and low confidence in society are prevalent in certain areas.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> City of Malmö, *Action Plan 1999*, pp. 19, 23.

<sup>75</sup> City of Malmö, *Action Plan 1999*, p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> City of Malmö, *Plan of Action 2012*. Over the years, the socially vulnerable areas of Malmö have been subjected to many programmes and projects. The largest local newspaper, *Sydsvenskan*, calculated that in the district of Rosengård alone SEK 319 million (almost €40 million) has been spent on different projects since the late 1990s. The newspaper article alleged that there had hardly been any improvements in segregation, unemployment and the number of children who advance from primary to secondary education. But nobody really knows what would have happened without these projects. See J. Mikkelsen, “Mycket babbel – lite verkstad” (Much Babble – Little Activity), *Sydsvenskan*, 5 April 2012, at [sydsvenskan.se/malmo/mycket-babbel-lite-verkstad-1](http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/mycket-babbel-lite-verkstad-1) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, “Interim Report 2012”, City of Malmö, 2011, pp. 8, 14, at [Malmö.se/download/18.d8bc6b31373089f7d9800049794/Interim+report+Malmö+C3%B6+Commission+March+2012x.pdf](http://Malmö.se/download/18.d8bc6b31373089f7d9800049794/Interim+report+Malmö+C3%B6+Commission+March+2012x.pdf) (accessed 1 June 2012). The inspiration came from a commission working for the World Health Organisation under the leadership of Professor Michael Marmor.

In its final report the commission compiled a list of 72 possible measures, which cannot be dwelt upon here. However, one passage in particular seems relevant when investigating how to meet the needs of an ethnic group like Somalis:

Today we know that objectives can be achieved more quickly and resources saved through cross-sectorial or transdisciplinary co-operation within the municipality, between administrative levels and between public institutions, the business community and the voluntary sector. With this insight it is no longer acceptable to act based on perspectives or the use of methods with inherent limitations in the shape of silo-type thinking.<sup>78</sup>

In September 2010 the City Council of Malmö launched a five-year Area Programme for a Socially Sustainable Malmö that addresses five neighbourhoods. According to the council's homepage the idea is to gather residents, businesses, landlords, the university, authorities and others to “tackle the challenges of each area and build upon its opportunities”. Furthermore, the programme is supposed to be built around “physical skeletons” and “social muscles”. Dialogue and participation are central concepts and the emphasis should be to do things with rather than for people.<sup>79</sup>

Hjalmar Falck, programme coordinator for one of these areas, Seved, situated in Sofielund in the district of Södra Innerstaden, described it as a programme that “was started as a desperate attempt to accomplish something new in neighbourhoods where earlier projects and programmes have not been successful”.<sup>80</sup> This is an area with acute social problems and crime where many Somalis live.

The City of Malmö has over the years worked with some of the Somali associations on a number of specific joint projects. Certain information on these projects will be presented in section 10.

The most famous immigrant district in Malmö is Rosengård. Eva Ahlgren, head of city district, Jytte Lindborg, head of the educational department, and Marie Hendra, head of the culture and leisure department,<sup>81</sup> were clear that there are no areas where Somalis' specific needs are targeted. “We do not target groups, we do not distinguish between people”, indicated Hendra. “We see people as individuals, we do not consider their ethnic origin”, Lindborg agreed. “We meet all individuals as citizens of Malmö”, said Ahlgren and added: “In this arena we are all Swedes, we live in Sweden.” The only

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<sup>78</sup> Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, *Malmö's Path towards a Sustainable Future*, City of Malmö, 2013, p. 129, at [http://www.malmo.se/download/18.a81ab142d709775437c0/1387457281201/malmo%CC%88kommisionen\\_rapport\\_engelsk\\_slutversion.pdf](http://www.malmo.se/download/18.a81ab142d709775437c0/1387457281201/malmo%CC%88kommisionen_rapport_engelsk_slutversion.pdf) (accessed 20 December 2013).

<sup>79</sup> See [Malmö.se/download/18.2d03134212cf2b7c00b800034557/Omradesprogram\\_Hela\\_A6\\_2011-01-17.pdf](http://www.malmo.se/download/18.2d03134212cf2b7c00b800034557/Omradesprogram_Hela_A6_2011-01-17.pdf) (accessed 5 December 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Hjalmar Falck, 5 December 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Eva Ahlgren, Jytte Lindborg and Marie Hendra, 19 November 2012. Ahlgren left this position to be head of education in Malmö on 1 January 2013.

case where Somalis might be met as people with some common interest is if a Somali association approaches authorities, asking for assistance of some kind.<sup>82</sup>

According to Ahlgren discrimination is a non-issue: “Our point of departure is that people do not become discriminated against based on the colour of their skin in this country. Society (government) guarantees that all people will be treated equally and people have a lot of trust in society. True, there is a threshold into the labour market, but it is independent of country background.”

All three administrators appeared convinced that any hardships or barriers for Somalis in Sweden, creating a lack of belief in the future, belong to the past. Ahlgren reported, “Some were pessimistic earlier on and some families moved to Britain. But now there is greater optimism.”

### 3.4 Anti-discrimination Policy

Several international organisations monitor the existence of ethnic and racial discrimination and the efforts to combat it in a country like Sweden. While Somalis in particular are seldom mentioned, there is some focus on Muslims and people of African descent. Since Somalis belong to both categories, they are supposed to be a particularly vulnerable group. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Council of Europe’s human rights monitoring body, argues that “Afro-Swedish Muslims, particularly Somalis, face twofold discrimination on account of both their colour or ethnicity and their religious beliefs.”<sup>83</sup>

There is an argument that colour – race – is more central to European societies than ethnicity or religion and that this holds true for Sweden as well:

In general, across Europe residents of a non-European origin tend to be subjected to the most widespread and chronic forms of discrimination – and amongst this group black people and Romas are often the most vulnerable. As many scholars have pointed out before, even in a country like Sweden the patterns of discrimination and segregation in society reflect a centuries-old

<sup>82</sup> Much has been written about Rosengård. One of the latest contributions is T. Lifvendahl, *I rörelse: Möten i Rosengård 10 år senare* (In motion: Meetings in Rosengård 10 years later), Fores, Stockholm, 2013.

<sup>83</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, “ECRI Report on Sweden (fourth monitoring cycle)”, Strasbourg, 2012, p. 36, at [www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/sweden/SWE-CbC-IV-2012-046-ENG.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/sweden/SWE-CbC-IV-2012-046-ENG.pdf) (accessed 11 November 2013); see also V. Kawesa, “ENAR Shadow Report: Racism and Discriminatory Practices in Sweden”, 2012, at <http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/publications/shadow%20report%202010-11/25.%20Sweden.pdf> (accessed 15 December 2013); United Nations Association of Sweden, “Alternative Report to Sweden’s Seventeenth and Eighteenth Periodical Report to the Committee on International Convention on Ethnic and Racial Discrimination”, 2008, at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/UNASweden73.pdf> (accessed 11 April 2013).

colonial world order with white Europeans on top and black Africans on the bottom ... A contradiction presents itself in the insistence that race should not matter when in fact it does. If it was true that society largely was race-neutral and racial discrimination merely was enacted by a few ideological extremists holding on to outmoded beliefs, then race-blind politics may have been justified. But in a society where being perceived as white or not has a significant bearing on individual welfare, state-sanctioned blindness is itself a form of discrimination that preserves the status of status quo or racial inequalities.<sup>84</sup>

On 1 January 2009, a new act came into force in Sweden intended to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.<sup>85</sup> An Equality Ombudsman was assigned to see to it that the law was respected.

In 2010, Malmö was the first municipality in Sweden to launch a plan against discrimination. The plan had been worked out by elected politicians and representatives from different organisations and was approved by the City Council in September 2010. The plan covers all discrimination grounds and areas like the labour and housing markets, schools and the right to participation. The ambition is that the plan “shall be known to all the people of Malmö” and the work against discrimination is to identify and remove obstacles present to all people’s right to equal treatment, make clear that equal rights and opportunities shall be the norm in Malmö, inform people who feel subjected to discrimination where to turn for support and conduct opinion polling aimed at everyone’s equal rights and opportunities. In the section on participation there are a few statements of special interest in connection with this report on Somalis in Malmö since they do not only deal with the equal treatment of “all people”:<sup>86</sup>

- “The municipality shall, in its citizen dialogue work, particularly seek to bring in views from the groups that would not otherwise have their voices heard.”
- “Organisational activities and the voluntary organisations are important for creating places where groups who run the risk of discrimination can experience social togetherness and participation in the community. The organisations shall be able to seek financial support from the municipality for this activity.”

<sup>84</sup> M. McEachrane, “There’s a White Elephant in the Room: Equality and Race in (Northern Europe), in M. McEachrane (ed.), *Afro-Nordic Landscapes: Equality and Race in Northern Europe*, Routledge, New York and London, forthcoming (hereafter, McEachrane, “There’s a White Elephant in the Room”).

<sup>85</sup> See [regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/59/03/b463d1e1.pdf](http://regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/59/03/b463d1e1.pdf) (accessed 11 April 2013).

<sup>86</sup> City of Malmö, “Plan against discrimination”, Malmö, 2010, pp. 7, 19–20, at [Malmö.se/download/18.72bfc4c412fc1476e02800026022/HPMD+och+OMSLAG+ENGELSKA.pdf](http://Malmö.se/download/18.72bfc4c412fc1476e02800026022/HPMD+och+OMSLAG+ENGELSKA.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2013).

However, discrimination against Somalis seems to be a blind spot on the knowledge map in Malmö. Malmö against Discrimination (*Malmö mot Diskriminering*, MmD) is an organisation established in 2010 to challenge and counteract discrimination. During the first 10 months of 2012 MmD handled 56 cases, of which 42 percent concerned ethnicity,<sup>87</sup> but not one single case involved Somalis. During the first three months of 2013 about 40 cases were handled, but still no Somali one. “It is important for us to reach associations as well as individuals connected to the Somali group,” said Filippa Swanstein, head of MmD. “We have met representatives of Somali associations and presented our activities, but so far we have had no feedback.”<sup>88</sup> One reason for this could be that many Somalis distrust Swedish institutions. As Fudad Sharif noted: “Very few respondents believed that they would receive justice if they report acts of discrimination committed against them.”<sup>89</sup>

During the spring of 2013 further measures were taken to reach out to Somali communities. Johanna Ingemarsson from MmD opened field offices in the Rosengård and Seved neighbourhoods. Among the first visitors to the Seved office were 10 Somali women. They spoke about the lack of maintenance of their apartments in spite of having been promised renovation. MmD has now initiated an investigation.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.5 Summary

According to the MIPEX, Sweden has the best integration policy in the world. A key sentence in the integration strategy of the Swedish government says that “[s]elective measures directed towards foreign-born as a group must not be taken after the first period of time in Sweden”.

At the regional and local levels there are contradictory views among administrators. One statement from the regional level is that “the system must be adapted to people regardless of opinions about ethnic groups”. Another statement from the city level is that “we do not consider ethnic origin”, “we are all Swedes”.

The City of Malmö was the first municipality in Sweden to launch a plan against discrimination. Very little is known about discrimination against Somalis in Malmö. However, in the spring of 2013 the organisation MmD initiated an investigation on possible discriminatory treatment of Somalis in connection with lack of maintenance

<sup>87</sup> Malmö against Discrimination, “Verksamhetsberättelse 2012” (Annual Report 2012), Malmö, 2012, pp. 14–15.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Filippa Swanstein, 10 April 2013.

<sup>89</sup> F. M. Sharif, “Integration in perspective: An Ethnic-Based Analysis towards Understanding Integration of Immigrants in Sweden”, Master of Science Degree in International Development and Management, Lund University, Lund, 2013, pp. 2, 13, at [lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s/24965?ref=simple&orgid=&query=Fuad+Sharif&lur\\_simplesearch\\_submit=Search&title=](http://lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s/24965?ref=simple&orgid=&query=Fuad+Sharif&lur_simplesearch_submit=Search&title=) (accessed 22 August 2013) (hereafter, Sharif, “Integration in Perspective”).

<sup>90</sup> Email from Johanna Ingemarsson, 24 June 2013.

of their apartments. This seems to be one of the first initiatives addressing discrimination of Somalis in Malmö.

## 4. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

This section focuses on questions concerning Somalis' identity, belonging and interactions in Swedish/Malmö settings. Somalis' age and gender identities are also being transformed in their new country.

Five focus groups discussed questions concerning different aspects of identity for Somalis in Malmö.<sup>91</sup> First, there was a general discussion, touching upon religion, the role of clan and Somali identity in Malmö and Sweden, involving 12 men and three women. Second, there were four focus groups composed of older and young women and men respectively, discussing mainly gender and generational issues.

The older women's group had eight participants.<sup>92</sup> All but one of the women were over 20 years old when they arrived in Sweden. Some had children at the point of arrival and all but one have children today. In the younger women's focus group all but one of the six participants had come to Sweden after 2008 and most of them were studying either the Swedish language or were in secondary school.<sup>93</sup> All of them attended school in Sweden and were fairly happy with the education they received.

There were ten participants in a focus group with older men, although two of them were absent much of the time.<sup>94</sup> One at 43 was a bit too young for this group and the oldest was 62. He had arrived in Sweden in 1974. Eight men were married and two divorced. They all had children, two of them 10 children each. A young men's group comprised five men, of which one was too old at 40. The other four had been in Sweden for a short period of time, since 2009 or 2010. Only two participants had something to say about being a young man in Sweden today. A second group comprised three young men who had arrived in Sweden between 2003 and 2008.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, representatives of eight Somali associations were interviewed and generously shared their views regarding the above-mentioned issues.

### 4.1 Religion and Identity

Religion plays an important role in the life of most Somalis. Research on health among Somalis in Sweden found that "although the informants had had diverse experiences in life and were of different personalities, Islam always seemed to represent comfort and security". According to research among Somalis in other countries especially women become more religious after migration than they were in Somalia: "Islam may replace

<sup>91</sup> As mentioned, these focus groups had to be supplemented so that in reality discussions were held on eight occasions.

<sup>92</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with older women, 19 October 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Open Society Foundations focus groups with young women, 18 and 25 November 2012.

<sup>94</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with older men, 13 November 2012.

<sup>95</sup> Open Society Foundations focus groups with young men, 25 October and 9 December 2012.

their home by preserving their identity and sense of community.”<sup>96</sup> Johnsdotter also observed that women she interviewed reported becoming more religious away from Somalia.<sup>97</sup> This is a common theme in academic research on the Somali diaspora: “In a religiously, culturally, and socially new environment, Islam may work as a moral and also practical compass in everyday life for Somali refugee women.”<sup>98</sup>

There were two focus groups that explored the theme of identity and belonging. The first was a group of 12 men aged between 18 and 30 years old, seven of whom had arrived in Sweden between 2008 and 2010. The second discussion involved three women between 18 and 42 years of age.<sup>99</sup>

According to the women, religion takes on a more distinct shape in the diaspora. In Somalia people did not compare each other’s religious attitudes, whereas in a country like Sweden they have reason to make comparisons with other religions and observe the lack of religion. “A younger generation in Sweden has taken religion to a new level,” said a woman in her 30s, “Younger people are looking for knowledge in a way that the older generation did not. They want to know why and what, they are searching the international arena, they are building bridges to other Muslims.”

Most participants seemed to agree that it is easy to practise religion in Malmö, as there are many Muslims in the city and consequently people are used to Muslim prayer habits and clothing. In smaller cities, it was agreed that people are less accustomed and therefore display more prejudice. At the same time, at least according to the female participants, religious practice is stricter in Stockholm than in Malmö.

Religious notions associated with superstition provoked a negative response in the male group. *Jinns* are associated with old times but *baraka* (a blessing) is seen as something one can achieve through prayer, indicating that participants were unwilling to recognise anything that could be seen as superstition. However, some seemed to think that they could see things in another light in Somalia; the magic of religion exists there, not here.

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<sup>96</sup> K. Svenberg, B. Mattsson and C. Skott, “A person of two countries’. Life and health in exile: Somali refugees in Sweden”, *Anthropology and Medicine*, 16 (3) (2009), p. 284 (hereafter Svenberg et al., “A person of two countries”).

<sup>97</sup> S. Johnsdotter, *Created by God*, p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> M. Tiilikainen, “Continuity and Change: Somali Women and Everyday Islam in the Diaspora”, in A. M. Kusow and S. Bjork (eds), *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context*, Red Sea Press, Trenton, NJ, and Asmara, 2007, p. 224.

<sup>99</sup> Open Society Foundations focus groups on identity and belonging, 16 November and 9 December 2012.



## 4.2 Clan Identity

The clan system seems to play a similar role as religion: it is a source of comfort and security but at the same time an institution exerting paternalism and social control. Johnsdotter writes:

Many Somalis avoid any conversation about their genealogy or clan affiliation with others ... These issues remain sensitive and are especially delicate in relation to the Swedish society, as many Somalis have the feeling that Westerners' image of the clan system includes associations to war and backwardness ... In Sweden, many Somalis want to tone down the importance of the clan affiliation, but in reality the system persists, even if somewhat weakened and partly with new functions ... In the Somali group in Malmö, there are constant negotiations and internal debates about different people's doings. The social control exists in relation to the ever-present clan structure. The attempt to control and influence others may show in trying to talk sense into someone or, in some cases, plant rumours or start intrigues. It is obvious, however, that Somalis who have lived for a long time in Sweden, and are more or less integrated into Swedish society keep themselves at a distance from clan business.<sup>100</sup>

Similar statements can be found in any literature on Somalis, such as in the book *From Mogadishu to Dixon*: "As Somalis migrate to the West, they do not readily acknowledge to outsiders that clan is ever-present in their daily lives even though Somalis understand this to be the case. Somalis who live abroad are embarrassed by clan."<sup>101</sup>

It might be expected that in the all-encompassing Nordic welfare states, where the public sector takes care of most needs, clan membership would gradually lose its importance as a vehicle for social and economic security. However, according to Stephanie Bjork, it is the other way round: "In this context, there is little incentive for Somalis to unify because their basic needs are met by the state." In countries where they have to fight for their well-being, "Somalis tend to promote a nationalist identity".<sup>102</sup> The (now defunct) Integration Board in a 1999 report on Somalis in Sweden claimed that Swedish authorities in their eagerness to keep track of clan affiliations may have contributed to strengthening the Somali clan structure.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Johnsdotter, *Created by God*, pp. 26, 28–29.

<sup>101</sup> S. Bjork, "Modernity Meets Clan: Cultural Intimacy in the Somali Diaspora", in A. M. Kusow and S. Bjork, *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context*, Red Sea Press, Trenton, NJ, and Asmara, 2007, p. 136 (hereafter, Bjork, "Modernity Meets Clan").

<sup>102</sup> Bjork, "Modernity Meets Clan", p. 152.

<sup>103</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration – att stimulera integrationsprocessen för somalisktalande i Sverige* (Participation for Integration – Stimulating the Integration Process for the Somali Speaking Population in Sweden), 1999, pp. 22, 25 (hereafter, Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*), at [mkc.botkyrka.se/biblioteket/Publikationer/somalia.pdf](http://mkc.botkyrka.se/biblioteket/Publikationer/somalia.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2013).

When the matter of clan was raised in the focus groups on identity, one man said that clan may be important in the Somali countryside but not in cities and not in the diaspora. “Here we do not know who belongs to which clan. To be Somali is more important in Sweden.” Most people round the table seemed to agree. However, suggestion from another participant in the group that clan is still of importance for Somalis in Sweden today created uncertainty in the group about what to say. The first man responded: “We came to Sweden because of the clan, that’s what gave us our problems.” The second man said that the clan has its good and bad sides. One of the women was more outspoken on the issue: “The clan is there, we understand it, we want to get away from it. But when I meet a new Somali he tries to identify me by clan and region. The younger generation – even those who are born in Sweden – has unfortunately had to inherit it. There are young people who are even worse than the older ones.” The youngest female participant, however, who was born in Sweden, said that she and her friends do not focus on clan as the older generation does.

### 4.3 Somali-Swedish Identity

When asked about Somali and Swedish identities in the focus group discussions there seemed to be doubts about whether the term “Somali Swede” (parallel to Somali American) is a useful concept. “If you are a Swedish citizen, you call yourself a Swede,” said one man. “If an immigrant asks, I will call myself a Swede,” said another and continued: “However, if a Swede asks, one does not know what to say.” “When abroad, I call myself a Swede, but in Sweden I call myself Somali,” said a woman. It is thus the attitude of the Swedish population which makes it awkward for Somalis to call themselves Swedes or Somali Swedes. Another statement was that Somalis in Sweden stick together. “When we are together we feel safe.” Somali identity is apparently to a large extent created within associations and the family. To find a Swedish identity is not easy: “It feels like you have to be de-programmed in Sweden before you can be re-programmed. There is no space where you can be the person you want to be.”

The women in the focus group on identity had somewhat diverging opinions on Somali identity. The oldest participant said that Somali national identity is very important. The younger women also thought Somali identity is important, but in their eyes it is crumbling. “You do not know which foot to lean on. What has become of the nucleus of Somali identity?”

Participants seemed to view Somali nationality as a resource for finding a way into Swedish society, while religion hardly plays any such role. A mosque is not a place to find a job. Religion could rather – through discrimination – make it harder to get a job, especially for women dressed in a traditional Muslim way.

The discussions highlighted a generational divide in the sense of Somali identity. This was expressed by one of the somewhat older participants in the young women’s focus group:

These girls (the younger ones) are born during the war, they do not know everything about Somalia. They have not seen Somalia in peace. They have lost a lot of things. They have the same culture but they have not seen the entirety. Before the war people had rights in Somalia, women's roles were different, they worked more outside of the home, school was free. People born during the war have not seen that, they have lost part of the history. They view the world with different eyes.

A younger woman concurred: "We are different, we have not seen Somalia, we just fled. Maybe our children will see a better Somalia." Even though the young women might not have seen a Somalia without war, they feel deeply connected to it, as one of them said: "I have strong feelings for my country. I have my culture, but my mum knows more about how it was when there was peace."

The participants in the young women's focus group had a strong connection to Sweden, which they viewed as their second country. One way in which Sweden has affected them is in their relationship to time. In Sweden their time is more planned and being punctual is more important. Since everyone is busy with tight schedules in Sweden it is hard to get help from someone else. "Even if you have a brother in Sweden, he cannot help you that much since he has his own times and plans."

#### 4.4 Belonging to Malmö, a City of Diversity

When asked about their sense of belonging and the positive features of life in Sweden and in particular Malmö, Somali civil society actors (interviewed as stakeholders) and focus group participants identified the ethnic and multicultural diversity of the city as a central positive feature.

Ahmed Moalim from Siman noted the importance of the access to Somali cultural goods and services in Malmö, compared with cities like Stockholm and Gothenburg: "Here we, as immigrants, have all kinds of foods and stores. Malmö is the best city in Sweden."<sup>104</sup>

According to Warsame Osman from Hidde Iyo Dhaqan, Malmö offers a more open-minded environment than do Stockholm and Gothenburg, where visiting Muslim preachers have regulated life in greater detail.<sup>105</sup> Jama Osman from the Somaliland Association worked as a taxi driver for a while in Gothenburg. His impression was that people there took the time to talk to the driver, whereas in Malmö they just wanted to get to the right address as quickly as possible. Nonetheless, he preferred to live in Malmö where there are many immigrants. This has its advantages: Swedes have got

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Ahmed Moalim, chairman of Siman, 27 November 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Warsame Osman, chairman of Hidde Iyo Dhaqan, 3 December 2012.

used to people from all over the world and stores can offer what immigrants want, such as halal meat.<sup>106</sup>

Fozia Slone from the Woman2Woman Diaspora Action Group also emphasised that Malmö is a multicultural city which has much to offer.<sup>107</sup> Hashim Abdikarem from Somali Peace concluded that people in Malmö feel “that this is their land”, whereas immigrants in smaller municipalities may feel more exposed and vulnerable. Based on his experiences from having lived in a smaller municipality, he advanced an argument which challenges established wisdom: in an environment like Rosengård, Somali youth who are new in Sweden acquire Swedish from Somali friends raised in Sweden, whereas in smaller communities new arrivals become isolated and do not acquire the language.<sup>108</sup>

Muna Mohamed from W2W argued that Malmö’s diversity and the links for international trade and commerce give it an advantage over many other cities, but that this potential is not utilised due to deficient labour market inclusion.<sup>109</sup>

#### 4.5 Barriers to Belonging and Integration

The representatives of Somali civil society organisations were asked about their understanding of the concept of integration. A few key issues emerged: lack of information, education and jobs. The greatest challenge, as Ahmed Weli from the Afro-European Association put it, is that so many lack employment: “Sweden is at the bottom as far as jobs are concerned and Malmö is at the bottom of Sweden.”<sup>110</sup> Weli also focused on knowing the language, Jama Osman on education and work, “which means that you will meet a lot of people”. To Abdalla Jama of the NGO Hodi integration is being active and taking part in all kinds of activities in society and those who arrive in a new country have some responsibility to take the first step.<sup>111</sup> To Hashim Abdikarem integration means education, work and people getting to know each other’s cultures and traditions. Fozia Slone also emphasised work: “Integration takes place in the dialogue around the workplace table about customs and traditions, holidays in different cultures, etc.”

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Jama Osman, chairman of the Somaliland Association, 4 December 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Fozia Slone, chairman of Women2Women Diaspora Action Group, 25 June 2013. This non-profit organisation was founded in 2012 in Malmö to offer various types of support to women from all backgrounds.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Hashim Abdikarem, chairman of Somali Peace (*Somaliska Freds- och Skiljdomsföreningen*), 16 May 2013. Erik Abrahamsson, secretary, was interviewed at the same time.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Muna Mohamed, contact person for Women2Women, 25 June 2013.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Ahmed Weli, chairman of Afro-European Association, 27 November 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Abdalla Jama, chairman of Hodi-Malmö, 5 December 2012.

Others raised concerns about the cost of integration in terms of the extent to which they would need give up their Somali cultural identity and practices in order to integrate. Warsame Osman used the formula  $1+1=2$ . “Nobody is to lose from integration. Assimilation, on the other hand, is like mixing sugar (Somalis) with water (Swedes); the one is dissolved in the other.” He suggested that, first of all, Somalis have to integrate with each other. “If Somalis gather in a basement and men and women meet in different rooms, what kind of integration is that?” To Abdulfatah Warsame from SKKF integration is adaptation to Swedish culture – “it is not easy and may take more than 20 years” – at the same time, Somali culture must not be forgotten.<sup>112</sup> Muna Mohamed argued that there is a demand for integration in Sweden unparalleled in other nations. There is “a clock ticking all the time” which creates tensions between new arrivals and the rest of society. Other nations have a more open-minded approach and accept that different people adapt to a new society at different rates.

Participants in the focus group on civil and political participation (see section 10) were asked about their feelings about the concept of integration. They all regarded this concept as positively loaded. “Integration – it is good when people mix and socialise.” However, participants argued that “Swedes do not allow immigrants to integrate as they do in England and the United States,” and “When only immigrants live in an area like Rosengård there is no integration”. One man had lived in a Swedish village and said integration was much better there. However, he had moved to Malmö to be close to his family. Participants were agreed on this: you can integrate better into society in a small municipality, but without your family you will be intolerably lonely.

Somali civil society interviewees were generally cautious in identifying discrimination as a barrier to integration. Jama Osman pointed to mutual misunderstandings that may be interpreted as discrimination. “It is easy to claim to have experienced discrimination, but it is a complex matter. If you know the behavioural codes and act appropriately and still are treated in a negative way, only then can you really talk about discrimination.” Abdalla Jama said racism exists in all societies: “People compete for jobs. If you lose one competition you should not immediately think about racism – this will make you paralysed.” Hashim Abdikarem and Erik Abrahamsson felt that there is no palpable discrimination in the streets of Malmö. In smaller municipalities it might be different. Hashim remembered how he was attacked by a gang of Swedish youngsters in the municipality where he used to live, which made him reluctant to go out in the evenings. “It is not like that in Malmö.” Abdulfatah Warsame, however, alleged that discrimination is common and that it has been increasing in Malmö lately. Fozia Slone noted that there are preference and statistical discrimination as well as sheer ignorance among employers. Muna Mohamed asked how one could explain that Somalis born in Sweden are turned away when competing for jobs. “It is one thing to

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with Abdulfatah Warsame, secretary of SKKF (Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture, *Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*), 13 December 2012. Present at the interview were also Said Abdulkader, chairman, Idris Ahmed, board member, and Ali Osman Yusof, employee.

explain that someone cannot master the language, as may be the case for some older immigrants, but when youngsters born in Sweden, who master language and social codes, cannot get into the labour market this points to stereotyping and discrimination.”

Experiences of discrimination were recalled in the focus group discussions. The participants in the older women’s focus group told of how having a Swedish person make the inquiry about an internship or an apartment can open doors that are closed when they themselves make the same inquiry. Some participants believed that discrimination is linked to negative perceptions of their religion, and furthermore: “We are asked how will you be able to work in those clothes? But it is not the clothes that are going to work, it is us and our religion and culture need to be able to come with us.” “Sweden says that it has freedom of religion but we have not seen it yet, they say that we are free to practise our religion but we are not, it is just on paper.”

For older Somali men the discussion revolved around one theme: the difficulties getting a job or starting a business. There were comparisons with other countries where Somalis are more successful, like the UK and the United States, and with other refugee groups which are more successful in Sweden, like people from Arab countries and Bosnia. Participants pointed to several explanations for this situation: discrimination, negligence from authorities and negative reports in the media. “We are getting nowhere, but we are struggling to give opportunities to our children.” Some participants argued that their children would probably get nowhere even with a Swedish education and that they therefore would have to move to other countries or back to Somalia.

Others were more positive. “I believe in the future in Sweden,” declared a very young man. “I think I will get a job, live here for a long time, raise a family and contribute to society. I want to be a role model for my children, a role model in all aspects of life.” A somewhat older man, with university education and employment, agreed, but added that this is no easy piece. “I know what I have been through and what is expected. I can see both hope and hardships on the road ahead.”

The Integration Board observed back in 1999 that other immigrant groups in Sweden had a negative perception of Somalis.<sup>113</sup> It is well known that there is a hierarchy among immigrant groups; as Jonathan Ngeh states in his recent dissertation on African migrants in Sweden, “There is no reason to romanticise migrant communities as spaces of undivided solidarity and equality.”<sup>114</sup> As Somalis are at the very bottom of the ladder in employment and entrepreneurship, this will naturally affect their position in the hierarchy.

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<sup>113</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 47.

<sup>114</sup> Ngeh, Conflict, *Marginalisation and Transformation*, p. 190.

#### 4.6 Interaction and Segregation

Most of the participants in the older women's focus group have lived in Sweden for a long time and have Swedish acquaintances, but as one woman said: "Our dear ones are Somali." The people they know outside their Somali community are often colleagues whom they socialise with at work but not afterwards. "The Swedish colleagues do not want to integrate with us, they just say hi every morning, so it is obvious that we become closed in and our close friends are Somalis."

However, this separation does not seem to worry them as much as the segregation that they see at their children's day-care centres and schools. One woman voiced strong concerns. Her grandchildren live in Rosengård and the staff at the day-care centre consists of immigrants. She feared that her grandchildren might come to speak broken Swedish, just as she does, although they were born in Sweden. She was of the opinion that politicians "don't give a damn about Rosengård, and I get angry when I see the children in the day care in Rosengård". Another woman suggested a solution that would promote integration: Politicians need to take responsibility and mix children from different areas of the city.

In the young women's focus group one of the women, who had children, stated that there are many good things about school in Sweden: it is safe and children receive free lunches. However, there are negative aspects related to residential segregation: "We live in an area with mainly immigrants and the children do not speak either Swedish or Somali perfectly." The same woman observed significant changes in her residential area in Malmö since her arrival. When her oldest daughter went to primary school there were few immigrants in her class, while in her youngest daughter's class there were many. She believed that this is the reason why her oldest daughter speaks better Swedish than her youngest.

Most of the women socialise mainly with other Somalis. They have few or no Swedish acquaintances. Not having Swedish friends is not very problematic except from the aspect of learning Swedish. Language is also an obstacle when trying to get to know Swedes. Many of the women attend so-called language cafés where they practise their Swedish, often with retirees. Some of them believe that Swedes do not like to mix with other people. They have encountered open and helpful Swedes as well as Swedes who have prejudices and are racist.

Older Somali men also socialise mostly with other Somali men, at a Somali association, in their homes or at a restaurant. One man said that although he had Swedish friends he preferred the company of his Somali friends since it made him feel "more free". Some Swedes were visiting the Somali association to which most men in the focus group belonged, to assist with homework. However, what these men really needed was to meet another category of Swedes: "We need Swedes owning businesses, people who can offer us jobs."

Participants in the young Somali men's focus group seemed to have friends among other immigrants and Swedes, but their Somali friends were closest to their hearts. Said one man: "I want to be with those who can understand me, whom I can really trust." Another statement was that it is hardly possible to discuss family matters with or stay the night at Swedish friends' homes.

Several of the young men said they did not face any problems with friends from other religious backgrounds trying to make them abandon their religious or cultural habits. "They can make a joke about it, but they respect your choices," said one. "Sometimes my friends in school even remind me about attending the Friday prayer." "They know I have my religion," said another. "Well, sometimes you are seen as somewhat different or special," said a third man.

#### 4.7 Interactions with the State

The interaction between Somalis and Swedish authorities constitutes a major problem. Already in the 1999 report from the Integration Board there was talk of "a crisis of confidence between authorities and Somalis" and about "the need for opening a dialogue between citizens with Somali background and authorities involved".<sup>115</sup> Somalis are sometimes perceived as being suspicious towards authorities, which is not difficult to understand in view of their historical experiences under colonialism and dictatorship. It also works the other way around. Johnsdotter quotes one chastened man: "Being a Somali man in Sweden, you know when you meet someone from the authorities, that this person wonders who you are – are you perhaps a terrorist, a cheater, a khat-dealer or a mutilator?"<sup>116</sup>

Ahmed Moalim indicated that the basic problem is that it is very hard for Somalis to understand Swedish rules: "After 18 years in this country, it is still difficult for me to understand the rules." Other immigrants, arriving in Sweden at the same time as Somalis, have found the answers, just as Somalis have done in many other countries. Ahmed Weli agreed that Sweden's complex rules constitute a barrier, but added that other immigrants arrived in Sweden with more resources to start with. "We are the real asylum seekers who have exhausted all resources to get here." The barrier of rules is especially acute for new and young arrivals who have so far in their lives only experienced chaos and know nothing of a rule-based system.

Jama Osman put it in similar terms. The Somali and Swedish environments are very different, and therefore it is essential that new arrivals get correct information about their rights and obligations and what they must do to be able to get on with their lives. The best way to deliver information is through fellow countrymen of the new arrivals. They can convey the information in an accessible way. Osman noted that when he

<sup>115</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 10.

<sup>116</sup> S. Johnsdotter, *Discrimination of Certain Ethnic Groups: Ethical aspects of implementing FGM legislation in Sweden*, Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University, Malmö, 2009, p. 44.



works as an interpreter for authorities it might take hours to explain something, whereas he himself can explain the same thing in the Somali language in five minutes.

Abdalla Jama also observed that the Swedish model is not well suited to Somalis. They get benefits but too little information and can easily end up in welfare dependency, while bureaucratic barriers make it difficult to break out of this trap.

#### 4.8 Changing Dynamics of Gender and Generation

When immigrants settle in a new country, relations between old and young and between men and women are transformed. Older people lose some of their traditional authority as younger ones generally adapt faster to a new environment. In a country like Sweden, moreover, traditional gender roles may be challenged, as men who were accustomed to being the bread-winners find it hard to get into the labour market and women are expected to work or to be supported by the welfare state. Much has been written about males losing authority and self-esteem in relation to their wives and children and to the society in which they have ended up.

This was a view echoed by participants in the older men's focus group. All seemed to agree that moving between two very different societies inevitably entails a change of roles between husband and wife and between parent and child. Some participants were cautious and suggested that all families are not affected in the same way; some experience problems when roles change, others do not. Others made strong statements: "In Somalia the man is in command, in Sweden the woman and children are in command," and "In Somalia the husband works to support his family. In Sweden the family is supported by social welfare. The man sits at home and the wife concludes that he is doing nothing." The result is often divorce. One man concluded that this change of roles has historically been the same in Sweden as it is for Somalis today: "When women in Sweden were housewives there were less divorces compared with when they entered the labour market. Consequently, this is not a specific Somali problem."

Participants in the older women's focus group identified the focus and emphasis on women working for paid employment as an aspect of Sweden that differs from Somalia. "In Somalia we are treated as princesses, we just do our make-up, eat and stay at home. Working is voluntary for women. The husband is responsible for providing for the family." The participants were divided on the issue of staying at home, with about half indicating they would like to stay at home for at least some time or work only part time, whereas the other half did not want to stay at home.

In the young women's focus group, some stated that in Sweden girls are more active with boys. In Somalia, the culture does not allow relationships between boys and girls. Another cultural difference is the relationship with the extended family. In Sweden you do not visit your family very often and when it happens it is at set times. The young women however have an overall positive attitude towards Sweden. In Sweden, one can have a "free head" (a Somali expression), free to do whatever one wants with one's future.

The young men feel that relations between men and women have changed considerably. Men and women of the younger generation can sit together and discuss matters. The men agreed that Somali women are strong but have been held back for so long that they still have difficulties stepping forward with their ideas. "There must be a focus on opportunities for women from the very beginning. If we are paralysed on one side we cannot go forward."

Unemployment affects the relation between father and child in a similar way as it affects gender relationships. Said one participant in the older men's focus group: "The Swedish classmates of our children are saying that 'Your father is doing nothing'." In some families children are respectful and listen to their parents. In other families parents lose all authority and children are in command. "As parents we are helpless," said one man. "Our children want to have the same expensive clothes and shoes as their Swedish classmates, but we cannot afford it. There is a risk that children start peddling drugs to be able to afford these things. Then they will be in command of the family. And then we will read about Somalis and drugs in the newspapers."

#### 4.9 Summary

Literature on Somali diasporas has dwelled on the importance of religion for maintaining identity and offering a moral compass in a new environment. The clan system seems to play a similar role, offering comfort and security but also social control. Relations between men and women and between parents and children are transformed when people move from one type of culture and economy to another. In Somalia, men used to be bread-winners, while women often took care of the home and children. In Sweden, men have difficulties getting into the labour market, whereas women are expected to work or be supported by the welfare state.

Interviews with representatives of Somali associations in Malmö revealed that Somalis often define integration as being active in society, knowing the language, being educated and having a job. They defined the main barriers and challenges facing Somalis as including the lack of information, Swedish-language proficiency, education and jobs; the rules in Swedish society being difficult to grasp particularly for those who have only experienced chaos and know nothing of a rule-based system. In general, the representatives were cautious when discussing discrimination as a barrier, although it was noted that stereotyping and discrimination are a real challenge when it comes to youngsters born in Sweden who have a command of the language and social codes. They enjoy living in Malmö because there are so many immigrants and Muslims in the city, although there are not as many job opportunities as in Stockholm.

Focus group discussions on identity, gender and generational relations to a large extent confirm the pictures developed from literature. Religion plays an important role. Somalis find it easy to practise their religion in Malmö since there are many Muslims around and people are used to Muslim habits and clothing. Women, however, feel discriminated against, since they often meet the question "How will you be able to

work in those clothes?"; their conclusion is that in Sweden freedom of religion is "just on paper". When the matter of clan is raised, there are contradictory statements. Some argue that the clan has lost its relevance in Sweden, others argue that clan is still very important. On the question of Somali and Swedish identities there is also ambiguity. One statement says a lot: "If an immigrant asks, I will call myself a Swede. However, if a Swede asks, one does not know what to say."

Men and women alike have difficulties adapting to new gender and generational relations. For men the difficulty is that they often cannot find a job and support their family. They end up "doing nothing" and the result is sometimes divorce or loss of respect from their children. Women lack the extended support system of family and relatives to take care of children and elders, which in Sweden is replaced by day-care and home-care services. They are divided in their attitude towards the old way of life (being mostly housewives) and the new (being expected to enter the labour market).

Men or women, old or young, the message coming from Somalis is that they prefer to socialise with each other, partly because they feel freer and safer, partly because they lack proficiency in Swedish, partly because they are seldom invited into Swedish homes.

## 5. EDUCATION

This section discusses two different groups of people: those who have arrived in Sweden and need to acquire the Swedish language and upgrade their education, and Somali children and youngsters attending the Swedish school system.

The focus group discussion on education consisted of eight participants, seven women and one man.<sup>117</sup> Four of the women had only primary education, two had secondary education and one had passed a Swedish university exam. The man had a college education from Somalia. The youngest participant was 28, the oldest 68. Three of the women had four children, one had three children and two had one child each. There was also a roundtable discussion with some of the staff at the Immigrant Service and a roundtable discussion with a team of SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) teachers.

### 5.1 Educational Levels

The educational levels among those born in Somalia living in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and all Sweden are shown in Table 8. Between 60 percent and 70 percent of people born in Somalia have only primary or unknown educational levels. Compared with the other big cities, Malmö has no particular advantage or disadvantage. A smaller proportion of Malmö's Somalis has only primary education but on the other hand there is a larger proportion with unknown educational levels. Of the whole Malmö population (aged 20-64) about 14 percent have primary, 40 percent secondary and 46 percent tertiary education.<sup>118</sup>

**Table 8. Educational levels of Somalia-born aged 16-64 (%), 2010**

Level	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Sweden
Primary	43	43	36	44
Secondary	29	28	25	22
Tertiary	11	9	11	9
Unknown	17	21	28	25
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Statistics Sweden

The interviews and discussions with Somalis suggest that the data on the education qualifications and levels of Somalis may be distorted by the belief common among

<sup>117</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on education, 12 September 2012.

<sup>118</sup> See [http://www.malmo.se/download/18.228b8e2313f81626274ae2c/1383648027551/Utbildnin\\_gniv%C3%A5+i+Malm%C3%B6+1990-2012.pdf](http://www.malmo.se/download/18.228b8e2313f81626274ae2c/1383648027551/Utbildnin_gniv%C3%A5+i+Malm%C3%B6+1990-2012.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2013). Figures somewhat corrected by author.

Somali asylum seekers about the requirements for getting residency permits in Sweden. When they apply for asylum some hide their previous education and consequently have to start their Swedish education at the wrong level. Participants of the focus group on identity and belonging (section 4) agreed that this is a common and serious problem.

## 5.2 Information for New Arrivals

New immigrants in Sweden start out by getting basic information on Swedish society and learning the Swedish language through SFI.

New arrivals (asylum seekers who have recently received their residency permits) are entitled to 60 hours of information about society in Sweden. They receive the first 20 hours during one week at the City's Immigrant Service, and the remaining 40 hours are delivered by the educational administration. A roundtable discussion with some of the staff at the Immigrant Service was conducted to explore whether there is anything particular distinguishing new arrivals from Somalia.<sup>119</sup>

“Our task is to see to it that new arrivals are introduced into the system,” Barbara Asplund, the head of Immigrant Service, explained. “After that the Employment Service takes responsibility.” This introduction revolves around work, Swedish traditions and family matters. There is no follow-up with participants, except for families with children. However, the Immigrant Service is open to any individual who wants to get further assistance. One important message to convey, said Ms Asplund, is this: “There are high standards in Sweden, but there are also opportunities. It is important to give all you’ve got.”

In the experience of staff at the Immigrant Service, Somalis are more curious and open-minded compared with many other immigrant groups; they are not afraid to ask the “wrong” kind of questions. Women are more respected and have a stronger position among Somalis compared with many other groups. Somalis have the comparative advantage of using the Latin alphabet. However, they are less likely to discuss mental health issues and to accept loans with interest (e.g. loans for home equipment) compared with other groups.

At the same time, Somalis often have extraordinary difficulties due to the breakdown of Somali government and society: lack of education and difficulties understanding a highly organised society and welfare state. “They come from a dysfunctional environment and are used to doing everything by themselves, here and now,” an immigrant secretary, Daniel Ransholm, indicated. In Sweden, procedures may last for a long period, with the involvement of a number of authorities; there is a risk that people resign themselves and get used to living on social welfare.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Barbara Asplund, Head of Immigrant Service, and immigrant secretaries Ewa Westerlund, Eva Palm, Jennie Ström and Daniel Ransholm, 3 December 2012.

This was a view in interviews with Somali civil society activists. Abdulfatah Warsame emphasised the difference between the Somali and Swedish environments: “There has not been any government or educational system in Somalia for twenty years. Those who arrive today have to start all over.” The situation is aggravated by lack of information and difficulties in getting ahead in the Swedish educational system.

New arrivals also receive information on health and society from the Partnership Skåne and the County Administrative Board. The board employs two Somali speakers, who provide information and advice on 30 different themes. They deliver this during four intense weeks spread out over a couple of months.

According to one of the Somali-speakers at Partnership Skåne, Mubarik Abdirahman, the prior knowledge of Sweden is very different among his participants since they may span from young academics to old people without any education. Most have got some information from fellow countrymen, which is sometimes not valid, for example that Swedish authorities are keen on taking children from their parents.<sup>120</sup>

Mubarik Abdirahman has an explanation for the often heard message that Somali women are more go-ahead compared with men. Older men have had a position in society and for them it is tough to have to start anew from zero, whereas women have often been housewives in Somalia but in Sweden they get a chance to be more active and outgoing.

### 5.3 Swedish for Immigrants

Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) consists of three different study paths: the first is for people with very little education, the second for those with examination results from their primary or secondary education and the third for those with a college or university education. There are four different courses: A and B for the first pathway, B and C for the second, and C and D for the third. In SFI Malmö there is capacity for about 3,500 participants. According to a recent evaluation of SFI Malmö there are “a number of conflicts of interest and disagreements, which partly concern whether SFI is primarily language training or an integration effort.”<sup>121</sup>

Margareta Linder, principal and SFI teacher for more than 40 years, shared a number of observations:<sup>122</sup> khat abuse<sup>123</sup> is a problem among Somali men who sometimes cannot focus on lectures but disappear “out into the blue”. Many Somali women, on

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Mubarik Abdirahman, 10 January 2013.

<sup>121</sup> E. Frölich, “Utvärdering SFI Malmö” (Evaluation SFI Malmö), Malmö University, Malmö, 2010, p. 52, at mah.se/utvardering (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Margareta Linder and Yerk Liveröd, principals, and Kristina Persson, Marina Solid-Hersler, Dan Collin and Maxamed Yusuf, teachers, at SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.

<sup>123</sup> Khat, the leaves and shoots of *Catha edulis*, is chewed for its stimulant properties. It has been banned in several European countries.

the other hand, are very eager to attend school. New students often exaggerate their prior education, but this is not a serious problem since it is immediately detected, whereupon the student is sent to the right level. The fact that Somalis had no written language of their own until 1972 also affects their ability to access the Swedish language. Somalis arriving in the mid-1990s were generally younger and had a better educational background. Since the late 1990s many new arrivals have had little education.

It can be difficult for people with rudimentary education to understand a society like Sweden and all the concepts used in the Swedish language. "People nod and smile and seem to understand. But they cannot grasp the context, the whole society, the abstractions. There are many misunderstandings." According to Ms Linder there is a difference between people raised in different religions. Muslims and Christians live in different conceptual worlds. This means that someone from South America with a low educational level and Christian background can understand Swedish language and society more easily than someone from the Middle East or North Africa with a low educational level and Muslim background. It is, in essence, difficult to learn a language when you are not familiar with some of the concepts upon which it is built.

Mohamed Yosuf, SFI teacher, emphasised the lack of knowledge and prejudice of both Swedish authorities and Somali immigrants. Yerk Liveröd, SFI principal, also noted the Somali suspicion of authority. Whereas other groups turn to him to solve conflicts, Somalis do not. His observation was that there is first a period when new arrivals are confused and tread water, but after that women especially make progress quite fast.

During the focus group discussion on SFI a number of viewpoints came up. First, the preconditions for participants must be taken into consideration. Results depend very much upon their previous education and family situation. It is especially difficult for married women with children to focus on learning. In the past, SFI education had to be completed in less time, but "Today people can keep on for three years." However, one measure to speed up the process has been introduced: a bonus for those who complete their education within a certain time frame.

There were some comments on the high turnover of teachers, and a preference that teachers giving classes should be native Swedes complemented with a Somali teacher helping Somalis once a week. Arabic-speaking teachers sometimes use Arabic words and this creates confusion. It was observed that SFI students should be encouraged to speak Swedish with each other during breaks between classes, since as it stands, different immigrant groups all speak their own native languages with one another, thus missing a chance for further language practice and increased cross-group interaction. With no role models and no job opportunities to be seen beyond SFI, there are no incentives to access the Swedish language in a swift and effective way.

The main concern regarding adult education was, just as with SFI, the lack of employment opportunities even after completing the courses. A woman in her 50s said: "In other countries Somalis have better job opportunities. In Sweden it is even hopeless

to get a job as a cleaning lady.” This woman had taken a course for cleaners where employment was guaranteed after completing the education. However, when the teacher approached different cleaning companies, no Somali was offered employment. “Our teacher told us that there had been comments about Somalis wearing funny clothes and drinking coffee. These things happen when you get an education.”

#### 5.4 Children in School

The now disbanded Integration Board’s report of 1999 noted that Somali children in many cases had difficulties at school, due to different educational traditions in Somalia and Sweden, overcrowded apartments and lack of role models. Some asked themselves why they should attend school “when all Somalis are unemployed anyway”. Somali girls seemed to handle the strains better than boys.<sup>124</sup> According to the report there were problems of communication between school and parents:

Teachers do not know what to do when pupils do not want to attend e.g. classes in music, sport or swimming. Parents, on the other hand, do not always understand what PTA meetings and development talks mean and how important they are in the school world ... In Somalia, parents only visit school if the teacher has a difficult time with the pupil. If the teacher sends messages to the parents, it means that there is some problem.<sup>125</sup>

According to focus group participants, the issues mentioned in the report were not valid. Three mothers said, with one voice, that there is hardly any difference in behaviour between Somali boys and girls in school. And one mother exclaimed: “All Somalis attend PTA meetings.”

Newspapers regularly report on weak results in primary (compulsory) schools in Malmö. In 2011 a report from the City Office implied that there must be other reasons for these results than a large share of children with foreign backgrounds and parents with low educational levels, since these very children show lower results in Malmö compared with the nation as a whole. The results also differ very much between the eastern and poorer districts of the city and the western richer districts.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>125</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, pp. 32–34.

<sup>126</sup> Malmö City Council, *Obligatoriska skolan: Vårterminen 2012* (Compulsory School: Spring Semester 2012), City Office, Malmö, 2012, at [malmo.se/download/18.3744cbfb13a77097d877444/1383645587426/obligatorisk+skola+2012.pdf#search=](http://malmo.se/download/18.3744cbfb13a77097d877444/1383645587426/obligatorisk+skola+2012.pdf#search=) (accessed 10 December 2012); L. Larsson, “Flera faktorer bakom dåliga skolresultat” (Several Factors behind Miserable School Results), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 2 November 2011, at [skanskan.se/article/20111102/MALMO/7111029713/-/fler-faktorer-bakom-daliga-skolresultat](http://skanskan.se/article/20111102/MALMO/7111029713/-/fler-faktorer-bakom-daliga-skolresultat) (accessed 19 December 2013); K. Davidson, “Malmö delat när det gäller skolresultat” (Malmö Divided Concerning School Results), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 13 November 2011, at [skanskan.se/article/20111113/MALMO/711129955/-/malmo-delat-nar-det-galler-skolresultat](http://skanskan.se/article/20111113/MALMO/711129955/-/malmo-delat-nar-det-galler-skolresultat) (accessed 19 December 2013).



A 2011 report by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate said that the results in some schools in Malmö were “alarmingly low”, that there were huge differences in results between students in the same programmes in different upper secondary schools and that students in socio-economically vulnerable areas were significantly affected.<sup>127</sup> In primary education, only 60 percent of students finished school with passing grades in all subjects. This overall figure conceals dramatic variations between different schools, from 16 percent to 96 percent. Three districts in particular had weak results: Rosengård, Fosie and Södra Innerstaden. In upper secondary school 88 percent of students in Malmö received passing grades and out of these, 72 percent were qualified to apply for a college or university education. The inspectorate concluded that the weak results and the differences between schools “are well known” but that no measures for improvement had been carried out at city level since the previous inspection in 2005.<sup>128</sup>

According to a 2012 report from the City Office, school results from Malmö in national exams in English, Swedish and Math have improved and differences between city districts have been reduced. Nevertheless, huge differences remain. In Rosengård in the east about 50 percent of students have results qualifying them to move on to upper secondary school, whereas in Limhamn in the west this figure was about 90 percent, even though this district had the lowest teacher density.<sup>129</sup> In the autumn of 2012 results improved in Rosengård but deteriorated in Södra Innerstaden.<sup>130</sup>

Up to 1 July 2013, every city district was responsible for its own schools. After this date, there are three school administrations responsible for preschools, primary (compulsory) schools and upper secondary schools respectively.

All mothers in this focus group were worried about the school situation and future opportunities for their children. One complaint was that the number of teachers had been reduced. “It is difficult for one teacher to handle 22 children,” one woman argued. She had brought her complaint to the principal, but got the answer that “Sorry, we cannot afford to employ more teachers.” She questioned whether it would not be better to have a separate school for Somali children, where they could get the

<sup>127</sup> Press release from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate on 16 November 2011 (no longer accessible at the Inspectorate’s web site).

<sup>128</sup> Swedish Schools Inspectorate, “Regelbunden tillsyn i Malmö kommun: Beslut och tillsynsprotokoll” (Regular Oversight in the City of Malmö: Decision and Oversight Protocol), Lund, 2011, at skolinspektionen.se, pp. 3, 12–13, 17.

<sup>129</sup> See e.g. L. Larsson, “Bättre skolresultat men fortfarande inte bra” (Better Results in School But Still Not Good), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 9 November 2012, at skanskan.se/article/20121109/MALMO/7110999971/-/battere-skolresultat-8211-men-fortfarande-inte-bra (accessed 19 December 2013); B. Häggström, “Fler av niorna går ut som behöriga till gymnasiet” (More Ninth-Graders Qualified for Secondary School), *Sydsvenskan*, 19 November 2012, at sydsvenskan.se/ingen-sektion/fler-av-niorna-gar-ut-som-behoriga-till-gymnasiet (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>130</sup> B. Häggström, “Mer satsning krävs för högre betyg” (Huge Investment Needed for Higher Grades), *Sydsvenskan*, 11 January 2013 (no longer accessible online).

help they need. The man in the group argued that all efforts must be focused on children and young people. “Those 30 years of age and more are already beyond help.”

It is feasible to choose a better school, and it was noted that Swedish parents often take their children out of the schools in the Rosengård area. According to at least one woman, this opportunity is hardly open to Somalis, however. She had applied for her children to go to other schools, but they had not been accepted. “Children from the schools in Rosengård have no future and other schools do not want to take on children from Rosengård.”

Warsame Osman expressed concern that even the second generation, children who have been raised in Sweden and attended Swedish school, have difficulties entering the labour market. Obstacles may be that children do not get enough support in school and that parents, schools and children do not have the right connections.

Focus group participants also discussed bullying. Two mothers shared personal experiences. In one case a girl called the daughter of the participant “*blatte*” (a Swedish derogatory word for immigrant). The mother had written a letter to the principal, who summoned the parents of the other girl to a meeting. They did not appear, but took their daughter out of the school. In the other case the daughter had been nicknamed “Chocolate” and wanted to leave her school. The mother talked to the teacher, who summoned the parents of the children responsible for the offence. In this case the daughter moved to another school.

### 5.5 Introductory Education Classes for New Arrivals

A key challenge for the educational system is its response to the arrival of young people who have little or limited education or experience of formal education. In Malmö those between 16 and 20 years of age are sorted into “language introduction” courses by Birgitta Alriksson, development coordinator at the Education Department.<sup>131</sup> There are courses for beginners at three levels: slow for those with very little schooling, medium for those with six or seven years of primary schooling, and fast for those who have completed primary school in their country of origin. There is also a class for those with no literacy. Students start out at one secondary school in Malmö (Frans Suell and Jörgen Kock school) learning Swedish, math, civics, sport, visual arts and English. The next step is continuation school where students can take eight or 12 subjects (to be able to be admitted into a secondary school vocational or theoretical programme). At the Frans Suell and Jörgen Kock school there are 15 classes and at other schools in Malmö 11 classes. There are normally 16 students in every class. Students can take these courses for a maximum of three years. Naturally, it is very difficult for someone with very little education back home to qualify for national secondary school programmes.

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with Birgitta Alriksson, 9 January 2013.

In the autumn of 2012 there were 44 Somalis enrolled in these introductory courses. Many of them had previously only had education at home. No statistics on their course results are available.

However, Birgitta Alriksson had some insights to share. First, Somali students have an advantage at the very start since they are used to the Latin alphabet. Second, female students have a more vulnerable life situation than boys. Third, students with little former education often have higher ambitions regarding future careers than students with more education who knows what it takes and are more realistic. Fourth, Somali mothers are often very engaged in the education of their children.

## 5.6 College and University

Somalis lag behind when it comes to participation in higher education. According to a report from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and Statistics Sweden, 43 percent of 25-year-old Swedish youngsters had entered higher studies in the academic year 2010–2011. Among youngsters born abroad the figure was 37 percent. Young people from certain countries of birth were shown to do better than average – Iran 53 percent, Bosnia 48 percent and Poland 44 percent – while those below the general average were from Iraq and Syria at 31 percent, other parts of Former Yugoslavia 26 percent, with Somalia at 21 percent.<sup>132</sup>

## 5.7 Summary

About 70 percent of Somalis in Sweden have only primary or unknown education. In Malmö this figure is about 65 percent. This, in combination with having spent many years in a dysfunctional environment, makes it difficult for many Somalis to understand Swedish society and the concepts used in the Swedish language. New arrivals sometimes struggle when first introduced to SFI but after a while women especially progress quite fast.

Some schools in Malmö, mainly in the districts where most immigrants live, have been seriously criticised by the Swedish School Inspectorate. In Sweden, about 40 percent of young people move on from secondary education to college or university but among Somalis this figure is only about 20 percent.

Focus group discussants pointed, among other things, to the difficulties for married women with children to focus on SFI learning, to a large turnover of SFI teachers, and to the lack of role models and job opportunities, which means there are no incentives

<sup>132</sup> Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and Statistics Sweden, *Utländsk bakgrund för studenter och doktorander 2010/11* (Foreign Background among Students and Doctoral Students in Higher Education 2010/11), Sveriges Officiella Statistik (Official Statistics of Sweden), Statistiska meddelanden (Statistical Reports), 2012, p. 115, at [http://www.scb.se/Statistik/UF/UF0205/2010L11G/UF0205\\_2010L11G\\_SM\\_UF19SM1201.pdf](http://www.scb.se/Statistik/UF/UF0205/2010L11G/UF0205_2010L11G_SM_UF19SM1201.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2013).

to participate. The main argument about adult education was, just as with SFI, that there are no jobs available at the end.

All mothers in this focus group worried about the school situation and future opportunities for their children. They note that Swedish parents take their children out of schools in problem areas but doubt that they themselves can use this opportunity to choose better schools for their children.

## 6. EMPLOYMENT

This section covers the following issues: employment, self-employment, income, establishment of new arrivals and local labour market programmes.

The focus group for this topic consisted of five women and three men.<sup>133</sup> Their ages spanned from 30 to 73; some had no formal education, others had been to college and their time of arrival in Sweden ranged from 1991 to 2011. Most of them had been working in Somalia. Three women had worked in shops, one man had worked as a bus driver, one as a pharmacist and two participants (one man and one woman) had been employed at government ministries in Mogadishu. Their work experiences in Sweden were quite sporadic. Three women had had work experience at different places – restaurants, day-care centres, Somali associations – and one had been an assistant to a handicapped person. At the time of the focus group discussion five of them had no employment and two were retired. One woman was in a training programme to be able to start a business of her own and one man had recently started his own business.

### 6.1 Employment

A recent analysis of the labour market situation in Malmö showed that employment in 2010 among Swedish-born residents aged 20–64 was about 75 percent and among foreign-born residents about 43 percent. There is thus an employment gap between Swedish-born and foreign-born of no less than 32 percent. In Stockholm and Gothenburg the gap is 22 percent and 26 percent respectively (Cf Table 3). Malmö is furthermore exceptional in that 48 percent of all those born outside the EU (aged 20–64 in 2010) are not engaged in work or studies. In Stockholm and Gothenburg these figures are 35 percent and 39 percent respectively.<sup>134</sup>

At the end of the 1990s only about 10 percent of Somalis in Sweden were employed. The Integration Board suggested that the lower educational level among Somalis compared with the rest of the population could not wholly explain this low figure. The differences in economic structure between Somalia and Sweden were argued to have an impact: “If you depart from the economic structure of Somalia and Sweden, you can understand that it is hard to find a job in Sweden directly linked to previous working life in Somalia. The presence of industries in Somalia is very limited.” Employment among Somali women was especially low. This was attributed to their role as carer for young children and their participation in education. “Regardless of the reason, the

<sup>133</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on employment, 18 October 2012.

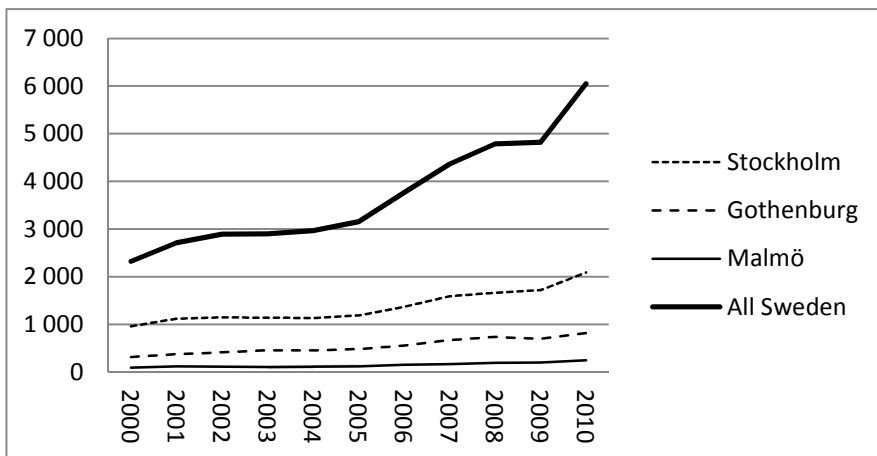
<sup>134</sup> T. Salonen, *Befolkningsrörelser, försörjningsvillkor och bostadssegregation – en sociodynamisk analys av Malmö* (Population Movements, Support Conditions and Housing Segregation – a Sociodynamic Analysis of Malmö), City of Malmö, 2012, pp. 29, 35, at [malmose.se/download/18.d8bc6b31373089f7d9800059627/1383647137957/Det+dolda+Malm%C3%B6\\_Tapio+Salonen\\_Malm%C3%B6kommissionen\\_final.pdf](http://malmose.se/download/18.d8bc6b31373089f7d9800059627/1383647137957/Det+dolda+Malm%C3%B6_Tapio+Salonen_Malm%C3%B6kommissionen_final.pdf) (accessed 20 December 2012) (hereafter, Salonen, *Befolkningsrörelser, försörjningsvillkor och bostadssegregation*).

absence of Somali women in the labour market is striking,” the board noted. However, at that time employment figures improved substantially, which led the board to make an optimistic projection: “Today, the situation looks brighter. More and more Somalis are established on the labour market, above all in the Stockholm region.”<sup>135</sup> This optimism proved to be hasty.

Figure 3 shows that the number of employed Somalis aged 20–64 in the big cities and all Sweden has increased substantially over the years. However, when the number of employed is seen in relation to the Somali-born population of the same age, the figures have been around the same level for a decade (Figure 4). In Stockholm they have been around 35 percent, in Malmö around 20 percent. This weak employment rate can of course to a large extent be explained by the heavy influx of new arrivals during these 10 years. The downturn in 2009 was also due to a tighter labour market caused by the global financial crisis.

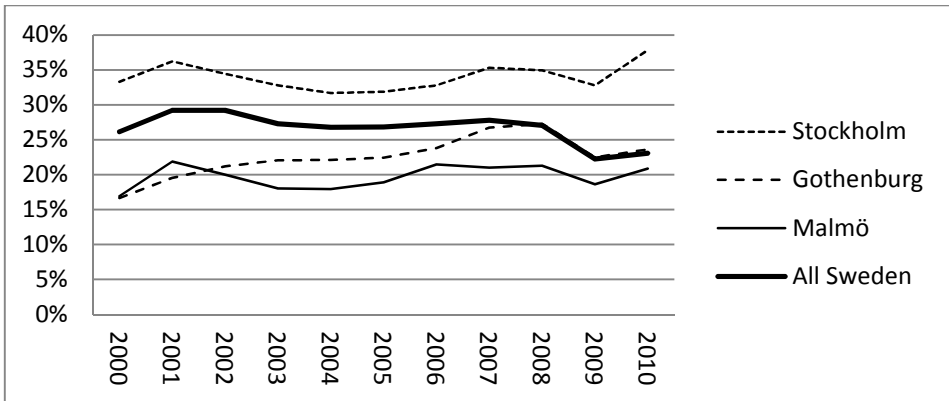
In 2010 the employment rate in Sweden among Somalia-born aged 20–64 was 23 percent (28 percent for men and 18 percent for women), compared with 76 percent (77 percent for men and 75 percent for women) for the general population. The employment gap between the general population and the Somalia-born was thus 53 percentage points (49 percentage points for men and 57 percentage points for women). The employment rate for Somalia-born in Malmö was 21 percent (22 percent for men and 20 percent for women). This very narrow gap between Somalia-born men and women is unique to Malmö. In Stockholm the gap was 16 percentage points, in Gothenburg 8 percentage points and in all Sweden 9 percentage points.

**Figure 3. Number of employed Somalia-born aged 20–64, 2000–2010**



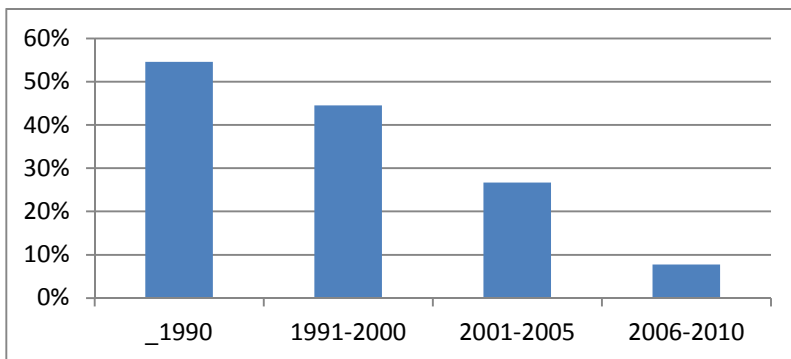
Source: Statistics Sweden

<sup>135</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, pp. 45–47.

**Figure 4. Employment rate for Somalia-born aged 20–64 (%), 2000–2010**

Source: Statistics Sweden

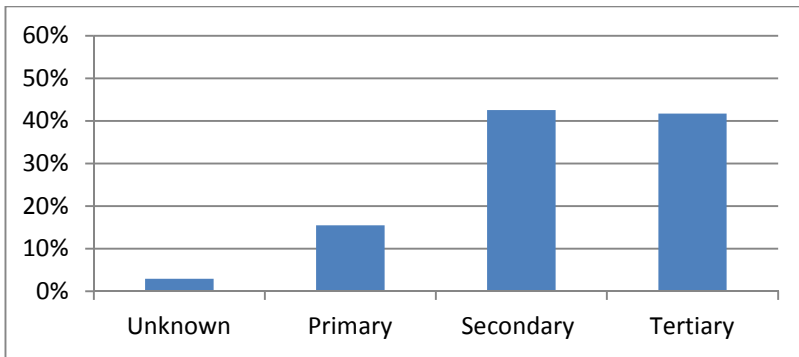
The time in Sweden and educational levels for Somalia-born have been noted in sections 2 and 5. Employment rates calculated according to these variables for Somalia-born in all Sweden can be seen in Figures 5 and 6.<sup>136</sup> These figures explain a large part of the low employment rate for Somalis: 60 percent of Somalis arrived after 2005 and in this group the employment rate is less than 8 percent. 44 percent have only primary education and in this group the employment rate is 15 percent. For 25 percent the educational level is unknown and within this group the employment rate is only 3 percent.

**Figure 5. Employment rate for Somalia-born aged 16–64 according to time in Sweden in 2010 (%)**

Source: Statistics Sweden

<sup>136</sup> Access to employment figures over time (2000–2010) are available for ages 20–64, whereas figures for time in Sweden, educational levels (and employment) in 2010 are available only for ages 16–64.

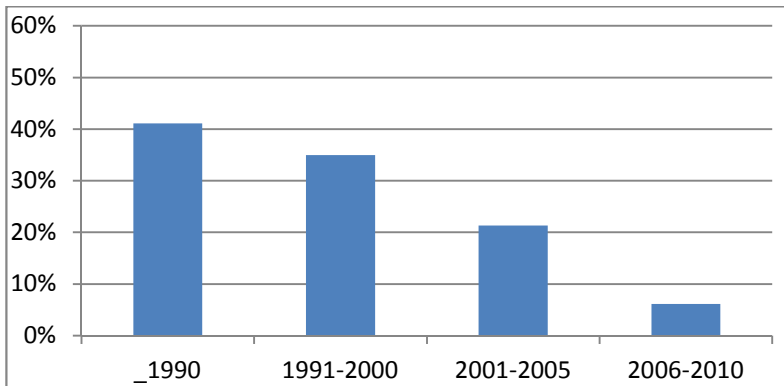
**Figure 6. Employment rate for Somalia-born aged 16–64 according to educational level in Sweden in 2010 (%)**



Source: Statistics Sweden

As can be seen from Figures 7 and 8, the tendencies are the same in Malmö as in the rest of the country. The major differences are that the effect of time is slower in Malmö and that the effect of secondary education is somewhat smaller in Malmö compared with the rest of Sweden.

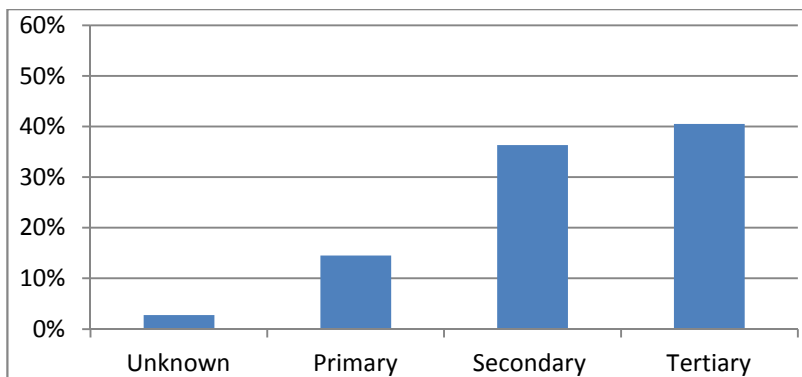
**Figure 7. Employment rate for Somalia-born aged 16–64 in Malmö according to time in Sweden in 2010 (%)**



Source: Statistics Sweden



**Figure 8. Employment rate for Somalia-born aged 16–64 in Malmö according to educational level in 2010 (%)**



Source: Statistics Sweden

The unemployment rate for Somalis is of fairly little interest since so few Somalis are in the labour force. In order to be eligible for unemployment benefits an individual must be registered at the Public Employment Service and actively seeking work. According to Statistics Sweden, only about 1,000 Somalis received unemployment benefits sometime during 2010. This means that 4–5 percent of the Somali population aged 16–64 received these benefits.

The vicious circle Somalis had been trapped in was described by two economists in 2009:

It is well known that many Somalis lack a job and it is not unreasonable to assume that many of them after long spells of welfare dependence have lost faith in their own ability. If the rest of society also show low expectations of Somalis and perceive them as passive, this turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>137</sup>

The economists concluded from interviews with Somalis that they had a strong desire to work. They all, regardless of educational level, claimed to be prepared to take any available job. But they could not pass the different barriers in the Swedish labour market – relatively high (bargained) minimum wages, strong legal job security, wide tax wedges – which make employers shy away from employing people of uncertain capacity.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>137</sup> A. Bornhäll and H. Westerberg, *Fattigdomsfällan slår igen: Somalier i utanförskap i Sverige* (Caught in the Poverty Trap: Somalis in Exclusion in Sweden), Timbro Valfärd och reform, Stockholm, 2009, p. 8 (hereafter, Bornhäll and Westerberg, *Fattigdomsfällan slår igen*).

<sup>138</sup> Bornhäll and Westerberg, *Fattigdomsfällan slår igen*, pp. 8, 11–14. A tax wedge is the difference between what an employer pays and what a worker receives due to payroll and income taxes.

Among representatives of Somali civil society organisations, who, as we have seen in section 4, were much concerned about Somalis' difficulties in the labour market, some want to see sharp measures. Especially, representatives of Women2Women wish to see affirmative action and a quota system. They acknowledge that this might be controversial in Sweden, but argue that quotas have been provided for women in the political sphere and that women of colour have a longer way to go than women in general.<sup>139</sup>

Most participants in the focus group discussion had been to the Employment Service but had not been able to get a real job. "The office is there, but there are no jobs for Somalis who want to work," said one man. "Those who work cannot support a family with many children, they have to take loans," said another man and added: "You get more out of social welfare than out of working." None of the participants had heard of the labour market programmes organised by the City of Malmö (see below under labour market programmes).

One young woman had had work experience at a day-care centre and wanted to get a job there. To make this possible, the Employment Service would have to pay part of her salary. However, the officer at this agency advised her to exhaust her time on parental leave insurance before starting to look for a job. This woman, who had worked in the Middle East before her arrival in Sweden, argued that Somalis can get jobs in other countries without fluency in the languages of those countries. That this is not possible in Sweden (at least not without an extensive subsidy from the Employment Service) is in her eyes some form of discrimination.

One man had done work experience as a cleaner at a hotel. He was promised work for three months and the opportunity to get a permanent position after that. However, after 20 days the employer took on some other people doing work experience and the Somali man was asked to go. This man, like most of those who had been doing work experience often, was quite disillusioned about employers' motives: "All they want is labour for free."

After all, some Somalis are employed and the focus group participants mentioned Somalis working as bus drivers, SFI teachers, high-school teachers, home-care workers for the elderly, day-care centre staff, with an insurance company, at the Employment Service and at the local public housing company (MKB).<sup>140</sup> However, the road to employment may be very long. One story familiar to most participants concerned a man who had been a head physician in Mogadishu. He had to start from scratch in Sweden and it took him 20 years to be able to resume work as a physician although "the kidney is in the same place everywhere".

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<sup>139</sup> Email from Muna Mohamed, 30 June 2013.

<sup>140</sup> MKB originally stems from the name Malmö Kommunala Bostads AB (Malmö Municipal Housing Company).

Charlotte Melander reached the following conclusion in her PhD thesis on social support exchange and strategies to earn a living among Somalis in Sweden:

One of the strategies that is outstanding in my result is that several of my informants look for work in an ethnic part of the labour market. These jobs are created by the welfare state and are directed to other Swedish-Somalis. This ethnic [niche] seems to be the only space where it is possible to get work for some of my informants. Even if these “ethnic jobs” make my informants economically independent, several of them are dissatisfied with these ethnic positions because of their educational background and personal ambitions. Other strategies to earn a living were to go to university and to take a study loan, to start a business, to be passive and follow the instructions given by the authorities and to look for work in London.<sup>141</sup>

All focus group participants were aware of the fact that they are caught in a vicious circle. Most of their compatriots have no jobs and they therefore have no network to use to get information on vacancies or to recommend them for a job. As is well known, most Swedes get employment through networks and not through the Employment Service.

Hashim Abdikarem noted that after high school Somali youth often cannot see any openings. They get no encouragement or advice about what professions to choose. “They turn to other Somalis to find work,” added Erik Abrahamsson, “but these often lack connections in working life.” The lack of role models was also raised in the discussions. One man said that it is difficult to find a role model for all facets of life. His own father was role model for parenthood, but when it came to work he had to look to cousins in Sweden who were working. “The problem is that we cannot envision any real successful Somali to be inspired by. We have read about such people but they are not present in our own environment.”

## 6.2 Self-employment

The number of self-employed Somalis has also increased over the years (Figure 9). However, the situation in the larger cities has been fairly stagnant, and in Malmö the number of self-employed Somali individuals went down from 12 in 2006 to only eight in 2010. In all Sweden, only 20 percent of the self-employed are female. Up to 2010 the municipality of Malmö had not registered one single female Somali business owner. Between 2006 and 2010, the proportion of self-employment within the Somali population aged 20–64 in all Sweden decreased from 0.8 percent to 0.6 percent, and in

<sup>141</sup> C. Melander, *Inom transnationella och lokala sociala världar: Om sociala stödutbyten och försörjningsstrategier bland svensksomalier* (Within Transnational and Local Social Worlds – Social Support Exchange and Strategies for Earning a Living among Swedish-Somalis), PhD thesis, Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, 2009, p. 264 (hereafter Melander, *Inom transnationella och lokala sociala världar*), p. 264.

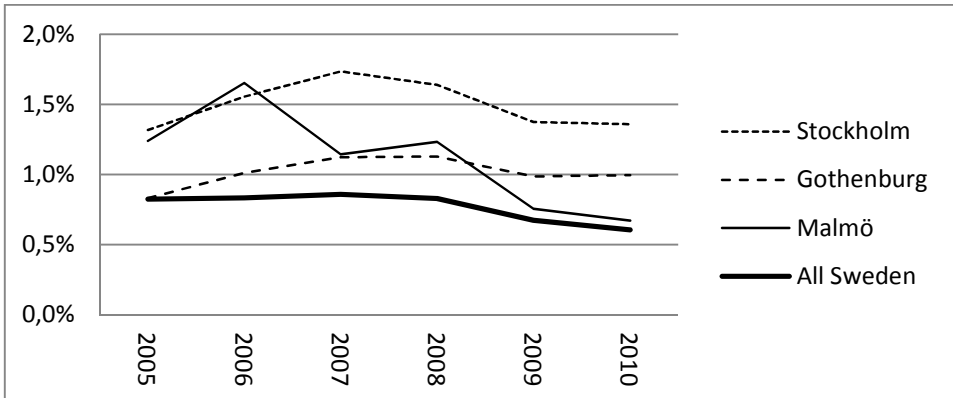
Malmö from 1.7 percent to 0.7 percent (Figure 10). Self-employment within the population of Sweden in general is about 5 percent.

**Figure 9. Number of self-employed Somalia-born aged 20–64, 2005–2010**



Source: Statistics Sweden

**Figure 10. Self-employment rate for Somalia-born aged 20–64 (%), 2005–2010**



Source: Statistics Sweden

One woman in the focus group argued that job-searching projects mean security for those who manage the projects, not for those who participate. This woman saw self-employment as the only way to be able to get into the labour market. However, it would be difficult for her to borrow the money needed. Her hope was that her family would be able to raise money. The man who had recently become self-employed also complained about the lack of support. He had been told to go to the bank to get a loan but once there he got nothing.

A woman in the focus group on identity underlined that Swedes probably do not understand how strictly Somalis interpret the Islamic ban on taking loans with interest. “Somalis do not bend the rules when it comes to interest.” In some other countries there are Islamic banks and Somalis with jobs can save and create credit circles which make it possible to start businesses. However, in Sweden there are no Islamic banks and many Somalis are on welfare and cannot save money.

As seen from the statistics above, self-employment is especially weak among women. In 2008, Margaretha Rolfson launched a project in the Somaliland Association with the ambition to help Somali women start their own businesses, in which 18 women participated. They were highly motivated and free to choose their line of business. “Everything went according to plan to begin with,” said Rolfson, “but it fell flop down when it turned out to be impossible for them to get interest-free loans. I was disappointed and they were disappointed.”<sup>142</sup>

Rolfson has given much thought about why Somalis have not so far been successful as entrepreneurs in Sweden. “There are many strong personalities with great resources, but something puts a halt to their plans and ambitions.” The long and demanding education for prospective entrepreneurs may act as a deterrent, since Somalis in their home country were used to starting a business as soon as they had hatched an idea. Participants in business education may not, according to Rolfson’s experience, be aware of the fact that they are themselves expected to get access to premises and funding. There may also be a fear of flying, fear of letting go of welfare and projects and taking a decisive step into the world of business.

### 6.3 Income

Income inequality has increased exceptionally fast in Malmö. In all Sweden the Gini index increased from 0.28 to 0.31 between 2003 and 2008, whereas in Malmö it increased from 0.28 to 0.35.<sup>143</sup> Malmö is also exceptional when it comes to the proportion of residents living below the poverty line (disposable income of less than 60 percent of the median income): 28.9 percent in 2008, increasing to 33.5 percent if individuals not in work or education are included. “About one out of three in working age in Malmö thus nowadays falls below this poverty line, which must be seen as extremely *high in a Swedish context*.”<sup>144</sup>

Wage income for Somalis (Table 9) reflects the low level of employment. In all Sweden – and Malmö – almost 70 percent of Somalis have no wage income whatsoever and 80 percent earn less than SEK 50,000 per year (approximately €8,808). As can be

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Margaretha Rolfson, 29 November 2012.

<sup>143</sup> The Gini index (based on a Lorenz curve) measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A perfectly equal distribution is 0, a perfectly unequal distribution is 1.

<sup>144</sup> Salonen, *Befolkningsrörelser, försörjningsvillkor och bostadssegregation*, pp. 37, 46.

expected, the situation is better in Stockholm, where 18 percent of men have an income above SEK 250,000 per year (approximately €29,039). In Gothenburg 11 percent of men earn that much, in Malmö only 6 percent.

**Table 9. Wage income (SEK) for Somalia-born aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

Wage income	Stockholm			Gothenburg			Malmö			All Sweden		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
0	45	62	53	63	74	69	66	73	69	62	74	68
1–49,999	12	12	12	11	9	10	13	9	11	13	11	12
50,000–99,999	7	7	7	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4
100,000–149,999	6	5	5	4	3	4	2	3	2	4	3	3
150,000–199,999	6	4	5	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3
200,000–249,999	7	4	6	4	3	4	6	4	5	4	3	3
250,000–299,999	8	4	6	5	2	3	3	3	3	4	2	3
300,000–349,999	5	2	3	4	1	2	2	1	2	3	1	2
350,000+	5	1	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2
Total	101	101	100	101	100	100	100	101	100	100	102	100

**Note:** Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

**Source:** Statistics Sweden

Putting these figures into perspective, in the whole Swedish population 25 percent had no wage income, while among Somalis the figure was 68 percent. In Malmö the corresponding figures were 32 percent and 69 percent respectively. In the whole population, 19 percent had a wage income of more than SEK 350,000 (approximately €40,654); among Somalis the figure was 1.6 percent. In Malmö the corresponding figures were 15 percent and 0.8 percent respectively.<sup>145</sup>

#### 6.4 Establishment of New Arrivals

In order to fast-track new arrivals into the labour market, a reform was implemented in late 2010, which gave the Employment Service the overarching responsibility for the establishment of new arrivals in Sweden. Of those enlisted during the first year and a half a little over half had at most nine years of school attendance and among the

<sup>145</sup> Figures on income for the whole Swedish population were also bought from Statistics Sweden.

Somalis the educational level was even lower, reported Liselotte Olsson-Kulevska, head of the integration unit at the Employment Service in Malmö. “The Somali group needs a lot of support and we often have to start out with basic knowledge.”<sup>146</sup>

A feature of these reforms is that new arrivals can choose an introduction guide to help them navigate their way through Swedish society. Most of the guiding enterprises chosen by Somalis have Somalis in their staff. Another new feature is that the Employment Service is supposed to help new arrivals find housing in a municipality where there are good preconditions for finding employment. However, some immigrants, and many Somalis, primarily want to settle where they have compatriots. They also move around which makes it difficult for the agency to keep in touch with them. Their close relations to others from their homeland can complicate the situation, when new arrivals get one type of information on the rules of behaviour in Sweden from authorities and quite other information from Somalis who have been in the country for some time.

According to Olsson-Kulevska,

Somalis, especially women, are very strong and energetic, they are very enterprising, taking their preconditions (lack of education) into account. However, we have not really been able to figure out whether they really want to open businesses. It is a different situation in countries where they have to go into business to be able to support themselves.

Fuad Sharif worked for an introduction guiding company, Miroi, and Omar Adam and Mustafa Nuur for another company, Etab Norr, in Malmö.<sup>147</sup> Mr Sharif was guiding 13 Somalis assigned to him during the autumn of 2012. The others also guide Somalis assigned to them recently. According to all three, Somalis are generally looking for Somali-speaking guides. The Employment Service has to be neutral and cannot recommend Somali-speaking guides but if a new arrival asks for a company with Somali-speaking guides, they will be informed about possible choices. “It is important for new arrivals that they get a guide who speaks their own language,” said Adam.

The three introduction guides agreed that the reform of 2010 was the right way to go but they were critical of some of its features. New arrivals are divided into two categories, those with less than and those with more than six years of education. This categorisation is too crude, the participating guides observed; there are huge differences between participants in terms of education, professional experience, linguistic skills, age and more. They need different kinds of coaching and so guides should be able to devote more or less time to participants according to their needs. All participants are

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Liselotte Olsson-Kulevska, 20 June 2012.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Fuad Sharif, Omar Adam and Mustafa Nuur, 14 December 2012. Present at the occasion was also Mukhtar Muse, who works for Etab Norr in Skellefteå. All four have been friends for many years since they arrived in Sweden. In the autumn of 2013, Sharif became project leader at the Somali Information and Business Centre.

supposed to get a plan of action at the Employment Service adapted to their specific needs, but in reality these plans are more or less standardised. “It seems as if the case workers at the Employment Service cut and paste information into a template,” said Mr Sharif. “All talk about taking the experiences and ambitions of each individual into consideration is mostly – talk. Sometimes we ourselves have to write new plans and send them back to the Employment Service case workers.”

Another problem for introduction guides that has attracted attention<sup>148</sup> is that they have to help participants with all kinds of paperwork required by Swedish authorities. “When one has sorted out all these things there is no time left to talk about work experience or work,” said Sharif. However, the three guides expressed doubts whether Somali associations could take on some of this paperwork: “Associations do not have the capacity that guides have.”

All three guides identified the Swedish language as a major barrier, especially for people who have had occupations that are viable in Sweden, like car mechanics, painters or bus drivers. They suggested it would be more cost-efficient for Swedish society in the long run to invest more in these people initially, by for example covering the cost of getting a driving licence. “Those who cannot get a job during the first years will have more difficulties later on,” said Adam.

Now, it should be mentioned, there is a programme to encourage the employment of new arrivals, the Entry Recruitment Incentive (*instegsjobb* in Swedish). Employers can receive compensation for 80 percent of the wage cost (maximum 800 SEK a day) for someone with a residence permit no older than 36 months. For someone working more than half-time this support can last for maximum six months, for someone working less hours it can last up to 24 months.<sup>149</sup>

## 6.5 Labour Market Programmes

The City of Malmö has a broad set of labour market programmes and projects under *JobbMalmö*, which is designed for people at all kinds of distance from the labour market. Monika Herstedt, head of activities, explained in an interview that “incredibly few” Somalis are taking part in these activities. The City therefore has no real feeling for the labour market barriers Somalis face. Since only about 20 percent of Somalis in Malmö are active in the labour market, their absence in *JobbMalmö* is an issue of concern. Herstedt refuted the common notion that there are few jobs for unqualified people in Sweden:

<sup>148</sup> See e.g. A. Bergström and F. Rosenqvist, “Lotsarnas roll har blivit en annan” (Introduction Guides Have Got a Different Role), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 14 December 2012, at [svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/lotsarnas-roll-har-blivit-en-annan\\_7753162.svd](http://svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/lotsarnas-roll-har-blivit-en-annan_7753162.svd) (accessed 20 December 2012).

<sup>149</sup> See [www.arbetsformedlingen.se/For-arbetsokande/Stod-och-service/Fa-extra-stod/Ny-i-Sverige/instejsjobb.html](http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/For-arbetsokande/Stod-och-service/Fa-extra-stod/Ny-i-Sverige/instejsjobb.html) (accessed 23 December 2013).



We have no difficulties finding “simple” jobs. The tricky part is to find people prepared to take these jobs. There are many excuses for not taking a job. We have to find out what people really want and how they think about jobs.<sup>150</sup>

According to the JobbMalmö database, 108 Somalis – 52 women and 56 men – were registered in all city introduction and labour market programmes during the first five months of 2012. Of these, 76 individuals were registered under the work and education unit. During the same time 24 individuals were discharged. Of these six found employment, 10 were transferred to the Employment Service (to search for jobs) and eight went into education.

Lars Ekström, section manager at the work and education unit, confirmed the impression that few Somalis take part in the city’s labour market programmes. His impression was that this is due partly to lack of trust in authorities and partly to lack of education and job qualifications, which means that many must rely on social welfare and cannot move on to the labour market. Hadil Aizi, labour market secretary, underlined that the lack of professional identity (qualifications, experience) is a major barrier for Somalis. Only those who “have something in their luggage” and are literate can get a job. Ekström added that many Somali women want to work in shops or at day-care centres. However, the latter kind of work requires specialised education.<sup>151</sup>

Recently, young “ambassadors” from the Somaliland Association have established cooperation with JobbMalmö, which means that young people from certain neighbourhoods are introduced to the services of this organisation.

There are also temporary labour market programs (partly funded by the European Social Fund) around.<sup>152</sup>

## 6.6 Summary

Employment among Somalis in Sweden was about 30 percent 10 years ago. Since then the figure has stayed at 25–30 percent, dropping to 23 percent in 2010. In Malmö the figure has been around 20 percent for a decade. Time since arrival and educational level to a large extent explain the low employment rate for Somalis in Sweden. The same goes for Malmö, although the effect of time upon employment is slower and the effect of secondary education smaller.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Monika Herstedt, 11 May 2012.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Lars Ekström and Hadil Aizi, 14 June 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Annette Thörnquist, when investigating two labour market projects funded by the European Social Fund and directed towards Somalis and Roma, notes the paradoxical situation that these projects are carried out in spite of the government integration and labour market policies which prescribe general measures directed towards individuals and not groups. See A. Thörnquist, *Arbete och integration: ESF-projekt riktade till somalier och romer* (Work and Integration: ESF Projects Aimed at Somalis and Roma), Temagruppen för integration i arbetslivet (Thematic group for integration in the workplace), Norrköping, 2011, p. 4.

Self-employment among Somalis in Sweden is weak, at about 0.6 percent, compared with about 5 percent in the whole population. In Malmö the proportion of self-employed actually diminished from 1.7 percent in 2006 to 0.7 percent in 2010.

The wage income for Somalis reflects the low level of employment. In all Sweden – and in Malmö – almost 70 percent of Somalis have no wage income whatsoever. In the total population this figure is roughly 25 percent.

When enlisted in the establishment procedure for new arrivals, many Somalis are looking for Somali-speaking introduction guides who act as mentors in the employment sector. These guides, however, often find that the plans designed for participants by the Employment Service are too standardised and that the guides themselves have to spend too much time helping participants with paperwork demanded by the authorities. The City of Malmö has a broad set of labour market programmes under the heading of *JobbMalmö*. However, few Somalis are enrolled in these programmes.

The focus group on employment found two simple and straightforward explanations for the low employment figures: “there are no jobs for Somalis who want to work” and “you get more out of social welfare than out of working”. Some participants saw self-employment as the only way to self-sufficiency, but this way is often blocked by difficulties getting a loan. Participants were aware that they are trapped: few Somalis are employed and those outside the job market have few contacts with Swedes who can supply information about vacancies or put in a good word for them.

## 7. HOUSING

This section explores Somali experiences in relation to housing. There was a specific focus group in which experiences of housing were discussed. The section therefore begins with the current housing situation of the focus group participants. It examines the system of housing allocation in Malmö and focuses on the views of participants on the two routes new arrivals can take to find their first housing. It then notes some more general views among focus group participants about the neighbourhoods they live in.

The experiences and housing situation of the participants in the focus group on housing vary. Eight participants took part in this discussion, seven men and one woman.<sup>153</sup> One man, who arrived in Sweden more than 20 years ago, owns a terrace house. His son, born in Sweden, also took part in the discussion. Two men, who arrived in Sweden between six and eight years ago and are working, one as a bus driver and the other as a newspaper distributor, rent apartments, as does the woman, who arrived three years ago. Three men, having been in Sweden two or three years, live as lodgers in apartments with friends. Within this small group, some pattern can be discerned: new arrivals normally move in with family or friends. After some years, and when they have secured some kind of regular income, they manage to get an apartment of their own. Eventually, after many years, they might be able to buy a condominium or a house.

### 7.1 Housing Settlement: Choice and Segregation

In many parts of the world Somalis in exile are concentrated in certain residential areas, sometimes nicknamed Little Mogadishu. In countries where they are active in the labour market and as entrepreneurs this clustering allows them to develop and work in businesses that service the local community. In countries such as Sweden, where the economic activity among Somalis is low, this clustering takes on a somewhat different meaning. It becomes mainly a way of feeling at home and secure among compatriots. The reasons for this clustering are summarised in the 1999 report from the Integration Board:

There are many reasons for Somalis to settle in certain residential areas. Being close to other Somalis, where they can feel secure and where they can get help and support in everyday life, is one explanation. The quality of services in areas with many immigrants is good from the Somali point of view. They can practise their religion in mosques or other premises. There are Somali associations and Somali/Muslim nurseries and independent schools. They can buy the food they want. There are, in other words, many advantages. However, there are also drawbacks when many refugees from the same ethnic group live together in a residential area. The lack of contacts outside the group makes it harder to learn

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<sup>153</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 22 September 2012.

Swedish, which in turn creates marginalisation. Peer pressure in the area becomes heavy.<sup>154</sup>

In Sweden, asylum seekers can choose between finding a place to live wherever they wish, own accommodation (*eget boende*, EBO), or moving into a housing unit offered by the Migration Board (*anläggningsboende*, ABO). Most people have chosen EBO. Politicians in Malmö – especially Ilmar Reepalu, Social Democrat and chairman of the Municipal Executive Board for many years, up to 1 July 2013 – have argued that the right of new arrivals to settle wherever they want, which means that they often settle in big cities like Malmö and in residential areas with many immigrants like Rosengård, is an untenable policy, since it puts too much strain on the resources of these cities and makes it impossible to stabilise these housing areas.<sup>155</sup> However, one study has shown that people choosing EBO can get a job and a home of their own faster than those choosing ABO, probably with the help of family and friends.<sup>156</sup>

The focus group was encouraged to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of EBO and ABO options. When the man who had lived in Sweden for many years first arrived he was assigned to a small community in the northern part of Sweden. “I was the only Somali in the whole municipality. I learned Swedish within three months.” The man argued that his experience could be a kind of model for new arrivals. First people should move around and get accustomed to the Swedish language and learn to navigate Swedish society. After that they could move into areas where other Somalis live, to share their customs. The usual pattern, however, is that new arrivals move into areas like Rosengård, where they speak only their native language and get to know very little about Sweden.

Even if they could acknowledge the problems of new arrivals moving into crowded apartments in neighbourhoods completely dominated by immigrants in the big cities, few focus group participants would like to see the EBO rule dismissed. “It is good to have free choice,” said one man, “but the information upon arrival could be improved.” “One must get formal advice, not only information from friends,” attested another man. Two other men argued it would be depressing to be placed in a small

<sup>154</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 27.

<sup>155</sup> See e.g. I. Reepalu, “Ebo-lagen är inhuman” (The EBO Act is Inhumane), *Sydsvenskan*, 1 October 2007, at [sydsvenskan.se/opinion/aktuella-fragor/ebo-lagen-ar-inhuman](http://sydsvenskan.se/opinion/aktuella-fragor/ebo-lagen-ar-inhuman) (accessed 19 December 2013) and E. Magnusson, “Het flyktingdebatt mellan Reepalu och Billström” (Fervent Debate on Refugees between Reepalu and Billström), *Sydsvenskan*, 21 December 2007, at [sydsvenskan.se/sverige/het-flyktingdebatt-mellan-reepalu-och-billstrom](http://sydsvenskan.se/sverige/het-flyktingdebatt-mellan-reepalu-och-billstrom) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>156</sup> P. Bevelander, H. Emilsson and M. Hagström, *Asylsökandes eget boende, EBO – en kartläggning* (Asylum Seekers Choosing their Own Housing – a Review), Boverket, Karlskrona, 2008. The recent influx of new arrivals to Malmö seems to have slowed, but the immigrant population will continue to grow with continued family unifications. See K. Bringmark, “Kraftig minskning av ebo-boende” (Heavy Reduction of EBO Housing), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 16 June 2012 (no longer accessible online).

village in the countryside. A young man suggested a compromise: families could be assigned to ABO but singles should be allowed to choose EBO. “If you are forced to live alone at some place in the countryside you will go nuts.”

The concentration of Somali and other migrants in Malmö is regarded as creating a barrier to employment. Mubarik Abdirahman, working for the County Administrative Board, is very critical of the opportunity for new arrivals to choose their housing. “You cannot expect someone who sleeps on a mattress in someone else’s apartment and is separated from his or her family to be able to get a job.” He therefore thinks that new arrivals should be directed to municipalities where there is decent housing.<sup>157</sup>

There have been policies that have sought to encourage mobility and movement to areas with employment. The labour market secretary, Hadil Aizi, used to work in a project, JobBo, which aimed to get people to move away from Malmö to municipalities where they could find employment. According to Aizi, Somalis living in crowded apartments in Malmö were interested in moving out of the city. However, their first priority was not to find a job but to get an apartment of their own, so that they would be able to bring family members to Sweden. Those moving were anxious to bring their family along and to ensure that there were Somalis living in the municipality to which they were supposed to move. To end up alone in an apartment in a small Swedish municipality is no ideal situation. As one participant said: “It’s just me, the TV and SFI.”<sup>158</sup> According to Inge Dahlstedt, a researcher at Malmö University and evaluator of JobBo, Somalis involved in the project were often living by themselves and most of them moved back to Malmö when the project was over.<sup>159</sup>

## 7.2 Allocation of Housing

More than 90 percent of all Somalis in Sweden live in rental apartments. In Stockholm and Malmö, 5–6 percent own their apartments. Malmö departs somewhat from the general picture, as can be seen from Table 10, in that 5 percent live in some “other” kind of housing, which probably means that they are living as lodgers with friends or relatives. The different forms of housing in Malmö are rental apartments (46 percent), condominiums (39 percent) and owned (15 percent).<sup>160</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Mubarik Abdirahman, 10 January 2013.

<sup>158</sup> I. Dahlstedt. and S. Rönqvist, *Timing och samverkan i organiserad vidareflytt: Utvärdering av JobBo 2* (Timing and Cooperation in Organized Resettlement: Evaluation of JobBo 2), Centre for Work Life and Evaluation Studies, Malmö University, Malmö, 2011, p. 33.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Inge Dahlstedt, 4 December 2012.

<sup>160</sup> Statistics from the City Office no longer accessible at City of Malmö web page.

**Table 10. Housing for Somalia-born aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

Type of housing	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	All Sweden
Rental apartment	93	95	88	93
Condominium	5	2	6	3
Own house	0	1	1	1
Other	2	2	5	2
Total	100	100	100	99

**Note:** Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

**Source:** Statistics Sweden

Boplats Syd is an agency owned by the City of Malmö, through which vacant rental apartments are distributed. The ambition is to achieve a fair distribution of apartments. At the time of writing 29,000 people were waiting for an apartment and the average waiting time was 2.5 years.<sup>161</sup>

The situation of one focus group participant illustrated the difficulties experienced while waiting for housing. The participant was a man who lived with his wife and two children in an apartment owned by friends. However, there was a quarrel and he and his family were thrown out. They now live with some other friends. This means that 11 people have to share three rooms. “We have been waiting for two years without getting anywhere. Everybody is complaining about the lack of apartments in Malmö. Even those who have jobs complain.”

The vast majority of apartments distributed through this agency belong to MKB, a public housing company which owns one-third (22,500 units) of all apartments in the city.<sup>162</sup> This stock of apartments is divided into four districts. According to Christina Lundby and Pål Svensson, property managers of one district each, the waiting time differs considerably depending upon the kind of apartment and neighbourhood the applicant is looking for. All people can apply as long as they have an income – social welfare counts as income – and have a record of good behaviour. MKB also hands over 100 apartments every year to the City of Malmö which it can use to give individuals temporary leases for two years, after which they can be converted to ordinary leases.<sup>163</sup>

For migrants to Sweden the ability to get access to housing is also dependent on having appropriate information about how the system operates. The general sources of

<sup>161</sup> See [boplatssyd.se/om-boplatssyd](http://boplatssyd.se/om-boplatssyd) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>162</sup> See <http://www.mkbfastighet.se/templates/Start.aspx?id=832> (accessed 15 December 2013).

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Christina Lundby and Pål Svensson, 8 October 2012. A second-hand lease means that the tenant rents the apartment from the person who has the contract with the housing company.

information about how to find housing, according to the focus group discussants, are word of mouth from friends and the internet site Boplats Syd, where people can register and get on the waiting lists for both municipal and privately owned apartments.

A critical view of Boplats Syd comes from the W2W Diaspora Action Group. The system is not transparent, since the individual cannot see where he or she stands in the line at the time of apartment viewing and housing companies give priorities to people working before people on government assistance, even though there is no such explicit policy.<sup>164</sup> This issue is, as a matter of fact, raised in the City of Malmö “Plan against discrimination” (see section 3), where it says that the municipality shall operate a housing agency with clear and transparent rules for the allocation of housing.

According to housing managers, all new tenants get the same information about the facilities when they move in. However, they argue that where relatives move in with the leaseholder, the housing company cannot control what kind of information these lodgers get. “We do not act until a problem becomes visible,” said Pål Svensson. “We try to keep good order and the same rules apply for everyone.”

Focus group participants also spoke about the difficulties of improving their housing situation without secure income or employment. A male focus group participant who owns his house and the two men living in apartments of their own all told stories about how they were able to access the housing market once they could secure an income. The homeowner had had difficulties getting an apartment many years ago when he lived in another city in Sweden. “It is difficult to get hold of an apartment if you don’t have a job. Landlords do not want tenants living on welfare. As soon as I got a job, I could choose any apartment.” Another focus group participant, a bus driver, had been looking for an apartment for almost two years. During this time he took a course to be able to work as a bus driver. “I was offered an apartment the same day as my job contract was signed.” When the man distributing newspapers came to Sweden he could move in with his wife, who had an apartment. After getting divorced, he had to look for an apartment of his own. He was studying, and financial aid for studies was accepted as income and he got a one-room apartment. He looked for a larger apartment for two years and finally was able to get a three-room apartment where he now lives with his children. The woman had just recently – after spending three years on a waiting list – got a two-room apartment even though she is not working and does not have children.

Participants living in apartments were fairly happy about the quality of their housing. They all live in apartments owned by MKB, in or close to the Rosengård area. “I have only seen MKB apartments so far and they are of very good quality,” said one man.

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<sup>164</sup> Email from Muna Mohamed, 30 June 2013.

### 7.3 A Tricky Neighbourhood

Looking more closely at the Seved neighbourhood (where many Somalis live), there are 4,500 residents and 70 associations of all sorts. When the area programme for a socially sustainable Malmö was launched, attempts to reach out to residents initially had the effect that people of Swedish middle-class background raised their voices about the lack of security in the area. To reach other segments of the population, the area coordinator, Hjalmar Falck, and the tenants' association started mapping the housing situation. They found 58 property owners, of which 16 were tenant owners' associations and 42 private landlords. They started visiting households and identified between eight and ten slumlords owning apartments where living conditions were substandard. This situation was given considerable attention in the newspapers and the result was that the housing situation was improved. "Today all landlords are under our watch," according to Falck.<sup>165</sup>

The opinions about the housing environment in general in the Rosengård area were divided. One man complained about the lack of security, which means that those living in the area cannot let their children outside unaccompanied. One main problem is youth gangs, often involved in drug dealing. "Many Somalis are new in the area and they are highly visible. They are often targeted by these youth gangs who have their established preserves." One man said it was difficult having people from so many countries of the world, used to different sorts of legal jurisdiction, gathered in one area. However, at the same time he argued that most people in the area are Muslims and "we all enjoy living together".

There are initiatives aimed at improving Rosengård. Eight apartments and shops in the area have been merged into combined units (*bokaler* in Swedish) and named Bennet's Bazaar and in several housing districts market places have been set up.<sup>166</sup> These initiatives are labelled "urban acupuncture" since the ambition is to pinprick strategic areas to vitalise the body of Malmö.

### 7.4 Summary

Somali immigrants in many parts of the world are clustered into certain residential areas, and Malmö is no exception to this rule. In Sweden and Malmö this clustering mainly serves to create comfort and security, not to create economic opportunities.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Hjalmar Falck, 5 December 2012.

<sup>166</sup> See e.g. L. Johansson, "Nu är bokalerna fyllda" (Now the premises are filled), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 7 January 2010, at [skanskan.se/article/20100107/MALMO/701079856/-/nu-ar-bokalerna-fyllda](http://skanskan.se/article/20100107/MALMO/701079856/-/nu-ar-bokalerna-fyllda) (accessed 19 December 2013); M. Sehlin, "Arbete och fritid går hand i hand" (Work and Leisure Hand in Hand), *Sydsvenskan*, 4 May 2010, at [sydsvenskan.se/bostad/bogranskarna/arbete-och-fritid-gar-hand-i-hand](http://sydsvenskan.se/bostad/bogranskarna/arbete-och-fritid-gar-hand-i-hand) (accessed 19 December 2013), and [www.hallbarstad.se/projects/52-bostad-lokal-bokal](http://www.hallbarstad.se/projects/52-bostad-lokal-bokal) (accessed 11 November 2013).



More than 90 percent of all Somalis in Sweden live in rental apartments. In Malmö 5 percent live in some “other” kind of housing, which probably means that they are lodgers with friends or relatives. One-third of all apartments in the city are owned by MKB, a public housing company. Apartments are transmitted through an agency where the average waiting time is 2.5 years.

In one neighbourhood, Seved, where many Somalis live, there are more than 40 private landlords, of which some could be characterised as slumlords. In this neighbourhood the area programme for a socially sustainable Malmö has served to improve the housing situation.

The focus group discussion revolved around the difficulties securing an apartment or living with friends in crowded apartments. All participants were fairly happy about the quality of apartments. The opinions about the residential areas were less favourable, with complaints about youth gangs. Even though participants were well aware of the lack of apartments in the city, few would like to give up the right for new arrivals to settle wherever they wish through the EBO option.

## 8. HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

This section starts out by noting some common health problems among Somalis in Malmö and Sweden and moves on to investigate Somalis' experiences of the Swedish health care system. The last subsection deals with social protection.

### 8.1 Physical Health

Between 2010 and 2012 a project on Somali and Thai women's health (Health Migration Integration, HELMI) was carried out in Malmö and a region in mid-Sweden.<sup>167</sup> The project started out with five focus group discussions related to Somali women, after which 122 women answered a survey. The HELMI survey revealed that about 70 percent of Somali respondents said they had good health, which is the same percentage as in the general population. The following health problems came up in focus group discussions: "stress, constant anxiety, aching muscles and difficulties sleeping, resulting from split families. Other health problems mentioned were bad memory, eczema, high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes." Among the respondents, 18 percent reported being exposed to physical violence by their present partner, mainly in Somalia but also in Sweden.<sup>168</sup> One of the most surprising results is the presence of obesity among Somali women, Inge Dahlstedt from the HELMI project observed: "What are the causes – diet, beauty ideals, post-traumatic stress syndrome?"<sup>169</sup>

A feature of Somali women's health that over the years has received and is now receiving much attention is female genital mutilation (which has been touched upon in the subsection on Swedish Perceptions of Somalis). The Swedish expert on this is Sara Johnsdotter, who has pointed to the clash between two ambitions: on the one hand, effective enforcement of legislation against female genital mutilation, on the other hand, legislation against discrimination and efforts to avoid the stigmatisation of immigrants.<sup>170</sup>

### 8.2 Mental Health

It has long been known that Somalis do not readily turn to the health-care system to get support for psychological problems. However, some Somalis, due to their

<sup>167</sup> See [www.mah.se/english/research/Our-research/Centers/Malmo-Institute-for-Studies-of-Migration-Diversity-and-Welfare/Research-at-MIM/Projects/HELMI--Health-Migration-Integration/](http://www.mah.se/english/research/Our-research/Centers/Malmo-Institute-for-Studies-of-Migration-Diversity-and-Welfare/Research-at-MIM/Projects/HELMI--Health-Migration-Integration/) (accessed 11 November 2013).

<sup>168</sup> HELMI, *Somaliska och thailändska kvinnors hälsa och arbetsmarknadsanknytning i Sverige* (Health and Labour Market Connection among Somali and Thai Women in Sweden), Malmö University, Malmö, 2012, pp. 34–37 (hereafter, HELMI, *Somaliska och thailändska kvinnors hälsa*).

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Inge Dahlstedt, 4 December 2012.

<sup>170</sup> S. Johnsdotter, *Created by God*.

experiences during civil war in Somalia, in refugee camps and along dangerous escape routes to a safe haven, are in fact wrestling with these kinds of problems.

Kristian Svenberg, a physician who, in collaboration with some colleagues, has written articles (and a dissertation) on Somalis' health problems, confirms that "mental disorders is (sic) often denied by the Somalis, who rarely seek the help of psychiatrists and psychologists". Having interviewed 13 Somalis, Svenberg found that "when confronted with any disease they could find support and consolation in Islam and its holy book. Friends and relatives could gather around the sick person, and read aloud from the Koran." Furthermore, most of his informants "talked about *jinns* (*gi*, *ginis*, *djinnis*) to explain reasons for illness, especially regarding mental symptoms".<sup>171</sup> A recurring idea among Somalis thus seems to be that psychological illness comes from some external source and has to be exorcised.

Svenberg further described how his informants experience the differences between life in Somalia and life in Sweden:

According to many of the informants, bodily pains, headache and dizziness were uncommon in prewar Somalia and seem to increase during a life as a refugee. The clear skies, the clean air, the limpid sea water and the fresh food in the homeland were all emphasised by the informants ... Descriptions of symptoms and chronic pains that diminished and even vanished during a temporary return to the homeland were common. Just as evident was the recurrence of these symptoms upon returning back to Sweden. When any organic disease or biochemical deviations can be excluded, one has to wonder about the appearance of these seemingly universal symptoms. Obviously, they could mirror the patient's life and living situation, distinguished by feelings of alienation, social exclusion and poverty.<sup>172</sup>

### 8.3 Post-traumatic Stress

As noted above, many Somalis have problems related to post-traumatic stress. In Malmö, the Red Cross has a centre for treating survivors of war and torture. Barbro O'Connor is head of the centre, Yassin Ekdahl is a psychologist and Eva Lidforsen is a therapist and physiotherapist.<sup>173</sup>

Ekdahl's role has been central to the centre's success. In 2003, the City invested SEK 4 million (€455,000) in a programme, IntroRehab, combining an introduction (SFI) and rehabilitation (through the Red Cross) for new arrivals.<sup>174</sup> During the first seven

<sup>171</sup> Svenberg et al., "A person of two countries", pp. 280, 285.

<sup>172</sup> Svenberg et al., "A person of two countries", p. 287.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Barbara O'Connor, Yassin Ekdahl and Eva Lidforsen, 18 December 2012.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Andreas Konstantinides, policy officer at the City of Malmö Department of Integration and Employment, 12 February 2013. IntroRehab has recently been transformed into a PTSD (post-traumatic stress syndrome) centre.

years no Somali took part in the programme. Concerned by this, city officials turned to the Somaliland Association for advice. From the association, the officials learned that there was little acceptance among Somalis for treatment of psychological problems and that there was no Somali-speaking psychologist on the programme. However, there was one man of Somali origin on his way to becoming a psychologist: Yassin Ekdahl. He needed a one-year internship to get his qualification. He was connected with the Red Cross and the City funded 50 percent of his employment. And soon Somalis (at least women) enrolled in his treatment.

People treated at this centre have multiple problems. They are mostly women with psychological and physical problems, they have sometimes been raped and diseases like tuberculosis are sometimes detected. “These women have strength, capacity and strategies for survival which could be used to a larger extent,” O’Connor reported, “but they are often lodgers, being used as housekeepers and having to support their children left behind in Kenya or Ethiopia.” They move from household to household and when information on their whereabouts does not reach the welfare offices they may lose their welfare benefits for several months. The combination of problems makes them only see barriers, not opportunities. They do not feel they have control over their lives. There is always someone else ruling their destiny. “People tend to forget their own capacity,” added Ekdahl. “They have been able to make the difficult journey from Africa to Europe, but suddenly they are not able to find their way to the nearest health-care centre.”

A report from the Red Cross on refugee family reunification emphasises the difficulties for women who have left their children behind. These women are tormented by feelings of guilt, and their fears are stoked when their legitimacy as mothers are questioned by authorities. Their worries prevent them from improving their own health and go on with their life in Sweden.<sup>175</sup>

Until recently, only a few Somalis had turned to the Red Cross for help. Today about 30 or 40 Somali women have been treated at the Malmö centre. The majority is fairly young, between 20 and 30 years of age, or somewhat older, 45–50 years old. They mostly come there on their own initiative or through the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) centre in Malmö, not by referral from health-care centres. The ice was broken by Ekdahl and then the message was spread by word of mouth and the stigma associated with psychological illness reduced. However, Somali men still have a long way to go to get help. “Somalis, especially men, are supposed to be strong and not vulnerable,” Ekdahl explained. It is thus difficult for Swedish case workers or doctors to detect the symptoms. The widespread abuse of khat among Somali men may be a way of trying to reduce feelings of anxiety. Some men cross the line and become psychotic.

<sup>175</sup> Sociala Missionen and the Red Cross, *Vägen till familjeåterförening: Nulägesrapport från arbetet med att återförena splittrade flyktingfamiljer* (The Road to Family Reunification: A Report on the Work to Reunite Split Refugee Families), Stockholm, 2012, pp. 23–24.

Lidforsen testified about the eye-opening experience a group therapy conversation can have for many participants: “When someone tells about exactly the things you yourself have experienced and feel, it can work as a healing power.” To begin with nobody wanted to be part of group therapy. Later on it was even difficult to end the sessions. “They just wanted to go on.”

Ekdahl expressed doubts that the sense of community cultivated by Somali associations could serve a similar therapeutic function. “People discuss politics and the good old days, but keep their troubles to themselves.” However, being with people who have had the same experiences as oneself could perhaps have a reassuring effect even if these experiences are not put on the table.

Do people get cured by the Red Cross centre treatment? “One cannot say much about results because the whole life situation of these people is unstable”, according to O’Connor. “They have been living with trauma for many years and it takes many years to heal the wounds,” concluded Ekdahl.

#### 8.4 Experiences of the Swedish Health-Care System

In an article, based on 20 interviews, Svenberg examined the encounters between Somalis and Swedish health care. His informants were ambiguous about the health-care system. Some expressed gratitude for it, some wanted more patience and respect when seeing a doctor. Svenberg continues:

Elderly patients, particularly, expected to be given medications, to which they were accustomed in their homeland. A majority of the informants did not approve of the doctor using a medical reference book to find any suggestions for treatment: they expected to be told immediately what was wrong without being asked too many questions. According to one informant, a joke among Somalis goes: the Somali patient sees a doctor and the doctor says: ‘So what’s your problem then?’ And the Somali says: ‘But, oh my God, if *you* can’t tell *me*, what kind of a doctor are you?’<sup>176</sup>

In Svenberg’s study informants perceived a suspicious attitude from the Swedish health-care system, and some complained that elderly people seemed to get less care. About 50 percent of participants in the HELMI study had not sought health care when they needed it due to long waiting times, previous bad experiences and linguistic difficulties.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>176</sup> K. Svenberg, C. Skott and M. Lepp, “Ambiguous Expectations and Reduced Confidence: Experience of Somali Refugees Encountering Swedish Health Care”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24 (4), (2011), pp. 694–695 (hereafter, Svenberg et al., “Ambiguous Expectations and Reduced Confidence”).

<sup>177</sup> HELMI, *Somaliska och thailändska kvinnors hälsa*, pp. 34–37.

Negative experiences were also reported in the Open Society Foundations focus group on health care in which five women participated.<sup>178</sup> One woman had visited the health care centre when her child developed eczema. She was advised to keep the child in a cooler environment. Back in Somalia, skin problems are normally treated with salt water so she treated her child “the Somali way”. When she came back to the centre, several doctors said she had done wrong. After that she did not want to go back to this centre, but at another centre the situation got even worse and she was accused of having mistreated her child. She now wondered if the doctors could not distinguish bruises from eczema and was reluctant to have anything more to do with the Swedish health-care system. Another woman had also visited the health centre with a sick child. She was told just to let the child have more water to drink. A few days after the child got a bad infection. She then called and visited the hospital emergency room and found that things worked out better there. Yet another woman had had severe pains in her shoulder for nine months, but claimed she got no real examination, only painkillers. She then turned to another health centre where she eventually got a cortisone shot, but there was no follow-up.

The general view from the focus group on health on the differences between health care in Somalia and Sweden seems to be that in Somalia the doctor offers a quick diagnosis and feedback. In Sweden the practice is to run tests at the laboratory but no explanation of the results is offered. Prescriptions are given out but no explanation given for why this particular medicine has been prescribed.<sup>179</sup>

According to Svenberg, some participants in his study went abroad, mainly to Germany, to get medical care. “Among the reasons given for this were the rumours of maltreatment and overlooked diagnoses in Sweden.” And furthermore: “German doctors seemed liberal in writing prescriptions, which was appreciated by many informants, in comparison with their treatment in Sweden and reminding them of conditions back home.” Other reasons for going abroad could be to get a second opinion or just to search for greener pastures.

Participants in the Open Society Foundations focus group on health were asked if they knew of Somalis having gone abroad to get treatment. All participants smiled and nodded. One woman had herself travelled to Germany when she lost her sense of smell. She was diagnosed with an allergy, got medication and was cured. The next time she visited her health-care centre in Sweden, the personnel questioned the medication and asked why she had gone abroad.

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<sup>178</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on health, 24 September 2012.

<sup>179</sup> According to a Somali physician (working in the United States) the core of the relationship between doctor and patient in Somali tradition is that the patient tells about himself or herself to begin with. “The physician just listens until the patient exhausts his/her list. Somalis are not trained in the simple direct answer/questions format. See A.I. Yusuf, *Somalis in Minnesota*, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MI, 2012, p. 33. The physician in question was Mohamed Abdurahman Hassan.

## 8.5 Discrimination?

The W2W Diaspora Action Group in Malmö claims that there is “widespread discrimination” in the health-care system, which ought to be remedied through culture-sensitive policies and courses training the health-care staff and through having a Somali-speaking employee in every health-care centre.<sup>180</sup>

Svenberg concluded:

A general feeling among the Somali community based on their perceived negative experience seems to be the lack of trust in Swedish health care, creating a general narrative of not being taken seriously ... Feelings of rejection following medical encounters seemed common and were exemplified by the informants using expressions commonly uttered by the doctor: ‘It’s really nothing,’ ... To the physician, rather than expressing a discriminatory attitude, ‘It’s nothing’ could well be intended as a message of comfort and relief.<sup>181</sup>

## 8.6 Information and Communication

All participants in the focus group on health had experienced difficulties with the health-care system. Their experiences stem from health-care clinics in the Rosengård, Kirseberg and Södra Innerstaden districts. A key theme underpinning the problems they faced was the lack of information and understanding of the health-care system and the difficulties of communication due to their limited fluency in the Swedish language.

The first problem is to get an appointment. One woman complained about the routine at her health-care centre. When someone calls to get advice or an appointment, the centre is supposed to call back after an interval. However, sometimes this does not happen and when it happens opening hours are almost over. Sometimes she had just walked in with her baby but then had to wait for a long time. A second woman complained that sometimes nobody even answered the phone. A third woman had to have someone help her call and accompany her to the doctor as an interpreter.

All women agreed that there was a linguistic barrier to pass in order to get an appointment and to be able to communicate with nurses and doctors. “They sometimes ask: Why can’t you communicate in Swedish? And they speak Swedish even though they are good at English. When they meet an immigrant they put you in a box labelled ‘new arrival’ and treat you as ignorant.” Such assumptions risk that cultural characteristics rather than actual symptoms are focused upon and so important information is lost.

The second problem, as indicated above, occurs when meeting the doctor. “When you ask questions about different treatments, it is as if you question their expertise as

<sup>180</sup> Email from Muna Mohamed, 30 June 2013.

<sup>181</sup> Svenberg et al., “Ambiguous Expectations and Reduced Confidence”, pp. 698–700.

doctors,” said one participant. “You have to explain your problem very fast. Are they already thinking of the next patient?” Several participants raised the problem that when they have tests they do not talk to the doctor about the results. Sometimes results are only communicated by a letter which they may not be able to read.

Two measures were suggested to improve health care for immigrants. First, information should be more extensive from the very start. Three out of five women claimed they had never received any information on how to use the health-care system. One had arrived as a student and thus not experienced any introduction programme. One had arrived as a relative and received all information from her husband. One had all her information from other Somalis. Two had received some formal information, one when she was interviewed by the Migration Board, one when she was assigned to the first municipality in which she lived.

Second, there should be someone at health-care centres, at least a few hours every week, with command of the Somali language, to facilitate appointments and communication with the personnel.

In the HELMI study opinions of Swedish health care were mixed. Suggestions for improvement were to make information more easily accessible, to have more time to put questions to the doctor and for the doctor to be more patient with new arrivals.<sup>182</sup>

## 8.7 Social Protection

Sweden is famous for its welfare state taking care of people from cradle to grave. One pivotal question is how such a system may affect people’s ambitions to try to enter the labour market and indeed society in general. The effect on incentives to work is not easy to judge since some benefits (unemployment benefits, health insurance, pensions) are based on income from employment while others (social welfare, housing allowances) are based on residence and enter into the picture when someone lacks income from work:

Insurances based on income can be seen as benefits which increase incentives to get a job and qualify to be able to access the benefit when necessary. When someone has entered into the system, the alternative cost for absence (from work) is reduced and possibly also the incentives for work. Benefits based on residence offers a basic security but reduce incentives to get a job or form human capital.<sup>183</sup>

According to OECD statistics, welfare and housing benefits in Sweden for a single person without children represented 55 percent of household median income in 2010.

<sup>182</sup> HELMI, *Somaliska och thailändska kvinnors hälsa*, p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> Å. Olli Segendorf and T. Teljosuo, *Sysselsättning för invandrare – en ESO-rapport om arbetsmarknadsintegration* (Employment for Immigrants – an ESO Report on Labour Market Integration), Ministry of Finance, Stockholm, 2011, pp. 89-90.



For a single parent or a married couple with two children these benefits represented about 40 percent of the median income. In an international perspective these benefits are somewhat less generous compared with the UK but much more generous compared with Canada or the United States.<sup>184</sup>

There are other benefits available. The parental benefit has been focused upon as an explanation as to why it takes considerable time for foreign-born women to enter the Swedish labour market. It offers at basic level SEK 5,400 a month (approximately €630) for 480 days for every child under the age of eight.

For every child under eight years of age the family is awarded 18 months of retroactive parental benefit when it is registered in Sweden --- Today, a family which gets permit of residence, with three children 5, 3 and 1 years of age, is awarded in all 4.5 years of parental benefit in one stroke. It is not surprising that this, in many cases, retards the entrance of foreign-born women into the labour market.<sup>185</sup>

Since Somali families traditionally have many children, this benefit may be one of several explanations for the absence of many Somali women from the labour market.

Ahmed Weli and Ahmed Moalim (chairmen of two Somali associations) pointed to an upcoming need that must be addressed quite soon: the need for care for the elderly in their own language – especially since many people will forget the Swedish language as they grow old – and with the kind of food they are used to.<sup>186</sup>

As far as social security the Somali way is concerned, reversion to the clan system is also an economic safety net. As Johnsdotter put it:

It would probably be reasonable to claim that it is one of the most globally comprehensive and well-functioning social security systems: wherever in the world you are you can get help and support from people you have never before met with.<sup>187</sup>

In the Open Society Foundations focus group discussion on social protection, seven people attended. Of these, one had a job, one had a study grant, three were living on welfare and two were retired. One issue that was immediately raised was the restriction

<sup>184</sup> See [oecd.org/els/social/workincentives](http://oecd.org/els/social/workincentives) (accessed 17 July 2012).

<sup>185</sup> J. von Bahr, *Varför är det så svårt för utrikesfödda att få jobb i Sverige? Internationell benchmarking av svensk integrationspolitik* (Why is it so Hard for Foreign-born to Get Jobs in Sweden? International Benchmarking of Swedish Integration Policy), Timbro, Stockholm, 2012, pp. 25, 48.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Ahmed Weli and Ahmed Moalim, 27 November 2012.

<sup>187</sup> S. Johnsdotter, *Somaliska föreningar som överbryggare: En uppföljning av 28 svensksomaliska projekt som fått stöd av Allmänna arvsfonden* (Somali Associations as Bridge-Builders: A Follow-up on 28 Somali Projects Being Supported by the Swedish Inheritance and Fund Commission), Malmö University, Malmö, 2010, p. 13.

on travel outside the country when living on welfare.<sup>188</sup> One man related what had happened 15 years ago when his parents fell sick back in Somaliland and his case worker would not allow him to go and see them. When he said he would go anyway, the message was that not only he himself – but his whole family in Sweden – would be punished economically. This made him very upset. “It was not fair to put me under pressure in an emergency situation like that.” One woman had visited her husband, left behind in Ethiopia, over Christmas and New Year holidays, and had been delayed on her way home for a couple of days. The consequence was that she lost her welfare cheque for one month.

The women who were in touch with the social welfare office on a regular basis seemed to be quite satisfied with the services they got. Opinions on the Swedish welfare system in general were balanced. “The Swedish system is good, very thorough, but must be adapted to new immigrants,” said the man and added: “Social protection is fine – but what about opportunities?” A woman argued in the same vein: “When you live on social welfare, there is no room for personal development; dependence becomes a barrier.”

One issue, raised by a retired woman, was specialisation among Swedish authorities, “If you want help to solve some problem, you often get the same message: ‘This is not my area of expertise, this is not my job’.” The same woman also argued against authorities intervening in Somali family matters. She said that when there is family conflict in Somalia a mediator is involved. In Sweden, when authorities intervene, the conflict often escalates. The man was of a similar opinion: “The social welfare office splits up families. They intervene straight away and do not care about our traditions.”

All seemed to agree that the parental leave benefit is a source of great relief for Somali families with children. Finally, one woman advocated what might be called community capacity-building with support from authorities. “This would also facilitate things for the welfare system.”

## 8.8 Summary

A project on health among Somali women in Malmö revealed that about 70 percent say they are in good health, which is the same percentage as in the general population. Many, however, abstain from seeking health care due to long waiting times, bad experiences or linguistic difficulties.

Many Somalis have mental-health problems due to their experiences in the civil war in Somalia but are reluctant to seek help from psychiatrists and psychologists. Somalis are also used to being somewhat differently treated by doctors in their homeland, where prompt diagnosis and thorough feedback are standard practice. The more limited explanations in Swedish health settings are a source of frustration.

<sup>188</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on social protection, 27 September 2012. Four of the participants had taken part of the first round of discussions on health.

In Malmö, the Red Cross has a centre for treatment of people who were wounded or tortured in war. Among Somalis, only women turn to this centre. They often have a very unstable life situation, living as lodgers and having children left behind in Somalia. Among Somali men the use of khat may sometimes be a way of reducing anxiety.

The focus group discussion on health confirmed the above picture. Somalis have difficulties – not least with language barriers – to make appointments with and get feedback from doctors. They would like new arrivals to receive more information on the health-care system and have someone speaking Somali employed at health-care centres.

The welfare system is famous for taking care of people from cradle to grave. From an international perspective social welfare benefits in Sweden are generous. The effect of different welfare benefits upon incentives to work is, however, not easily determined.

The focus group opinions on the welfare system were balanced. A rather telling statement was this: “Social protection is fine – but what about opportunities?” The compartmentalised character of the Swedish authorities sometimes leads to difficulties finding the appropriate office for assistance.

## 9. POLICING AND SECURITY

Being safe from crime and violence is an issue often raised by Somalis, which should come as no surprise given that many of them had to escape from crime and violence in their country of origin. Somalis with experiences from other countries like the UK see the fairly secure Swedish residential areas as one of the major advantages that Sweden has to offer. However, some of the areas where many immigrants in Malmö live have had their fair share of trouble and crime. The Rosengård district has experienced riots on several occasions. One riot in December 2008 became notorious since one of the policemen was documented naming one of the troublemakers as a “damned monkey”.<sup>189</sup> Police, the fire brigade and buses have on several occasions been attacked by youngsters throwing stones at them.

The kind of difficulties new arrivals may have when encountering Swedish police are exemplified by two of the leaders of Somali associations interviewed for this report. “Those who arrived in the early 1990s were afraid of policemen since they assumed they were tools of a dictator, just as in Somalia,” said Weli. Later on the misconceptions changed character. “When my son came from Mogadishu to Sweden he asked about which clan the police belonged to,” Moalim related.<sup>190</sup>

### 9.1 The Seved Neighbourhood

Pernilla Nilsson is head of the largest community policing area in Malmö according to the number of crimes and interventions, the City area.<sup>191</sup> This is where the Seved neighbourhood, in the district of Södra Innerstaden, is situated, which has a large Somali population and a serious problem with crime.

According to Nilsson, three groups of people are particularly significant in the Seved neighbourhood: Somalis, Roma and a criminal gang. The Somalis have their own associations and invite people to meetings concerned with various issues. They are seen as minding their own business and are not involved in conflicts in the neighbourhood. The criminal gang consists of about 15 young people, with a core of about five individuals. This gang has threatened residents in the area, extorting money from the Roma population, and conducts drug trafficking openly in the streets. Two or three Somali youngsters are involved in this gang. According to Nilsson, much of the area’s crime is related to this gang, but there are limited means to combat the problem.

There has been something of a popular rebellion against crime in the Seved area, with anger being mainly directed towards the police. At the same time, community policing

<sup>189</sup> T. Barkman, “Polis: ‘Den lille jävla apejäveln’” (Police: “The Little Damned Monkey”), *Sydsvenskan*, 16 December 2009, at [sydsvenskan.se/malmo/polis-den-lille-javla-apejaveln](http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/polis-den-lille-javla-apejaveln) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>190</sup> Interview with Ahmed Weli and Ahmed Moalim, 27 November 2012.

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Pernilla Nilsson, 11 December 2012.

has not been working well. Due to shootings and murders in Malmö, the police was assigned extra resources (“Operation Alfred”) to fight organised crime. However, this has meant a focus on investigative activities, not on a regular presence in neighbourhoods. Only a dozen police officers were available to patrol the streets of the whole city.

The area programme coordinator of the Seved neighbourhood, Hjalmar Falck, confirms the picture portrayed by Nilsson. There is close cooperation between him and the police and a rescue service to improve security.<sup>192</sup> Some minority groups, like the Roma, are particularly vulnerable to threats. There are also antagonisms between Arab and Roma groups. Somalis are not exposed to or involved in conflicts of that sort. They mostly remain within their own associations.<sup>193</sup>

## 9.2 Hate Crimes

In a forthcoming book by Michael McEachrane the situation with hate crimes in Sweden and Europe is summarised in the following words:

In Sweden there were more reported hate crimes in 2011 against black people than any other racial, ethnic or religious group. Similarly, according to the most comprehensive survey to date on minority discrimination in Europe, *The European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey* from 2009, black Africans and Roma experience the highest rates of serious harassment in the EU – and among the most targeted groups are Somalis in Finland and Denmark.<sup>194</sup>

In 2012, 5,518 hate crimes were reported to the police in all Sweden (down from 5,895 in 2008), according to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Of these, 3,980 crimes were of xenophobic or racist character (down from 4,224 in 2008) and out of these 940 had Afrophobic (up from 761 in 2008) and 310 Islamophobic (up from 272 in 2008) motives.<sup>195</sup> Crimes of an Afrophobic and Islamophobic

<sup>192</sup> See e.g. S. Johansson, “Trygghet på mingelmässa” (Security at Mingle Fair), *Skånska Dagbladet*, 5 December 2012, at [skanskan.se/article/20121205/MALMO/712059821/-/trygghet-tema-pa-mingelmassa](http://skanskan.se/article/20121205/MALMO/712059821/-/trygghet-tema-pa-mingelmassa) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Hjalmar Falck, 5 December, 2012. See also L. Stadler, “Handlar om civilkurage” (It’s about Courage), *Sydsvenskan*, 7 October 2012, at [sydsvenskan.se/malmo/handlar-om-civilkurage](http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/handlar-om-civilkurage) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>194</sup> McEnchrane, “There is a White Elephant in the Room”.

<sup>195</sup> Brå – centrum för kunskap om brott och åtgärder mot brott (National Council – centre for information about crime and criminal offenses, *Hatbrott 2012: Statistik över självrapporterad utsatthet för hatbrott och polisanmälningar med identifierade hatbrottsmotiv* (Hate Crimes 2012: Statistics on Self-reported Exposure to Hate Crimes and Police Reported Offences with an Identified Hate Crime Motive), Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Stockholm, 2013, pp. 29, 37, 43, 57, at [bra.se/download/18.6b82726313f7b234a5839/1372231125966/2013\\_16\\_Hatbrott\\_2012.pdf](http://bra.se/download/18.6b82726313f7b234a5839/1372231125966/2013_16_Hatbrott_2012.pdf) (accessed 22 August 2013).

character have thus increased their share of xenophobic and racist crimes from 24 percent to 31 percent between 2008 and 2012.

People of Jewish background are the main targets of reported hate crimes in Malmö (with about 50 reports in 2012). Muslims are second (about 30 reports), Africans third (about 15 reports) and Roma fourth.<sup>196</sup>

In a national inspection of police authorities' ability to discover and investigate hate crimes, the Skåne region (where Malmö dominates the picture) comes out quite well. This authority has introduced a hate crime phone to simplify reporting; it has a group watching over the internet and there are two special hate crime prosecutors.<sup>197</sup>

### 9.3 Khat

Khat is a drug associated with Somalis. In 2008 Swedish Customs seized 10 tonnes of khat and the following years seizures increased: 10.3 tonnes in 2009, 13.8 tonnes in 2010 and 18.3 tonnes in 2011. In 2012 the trend was however broken, with 11.6 tonnes, and between January and June 2013 only 3.9 tonnes were seized.<sup>198</sup> The Öresund Bridge between Copenhagen and Malmö is the gateway for khat smuggled into Sweden. In 2010 and 2011 80–90 percent of all khat seizure took place at the bridge.<sup>199</sup>

Khat is not all that common in Malmö, but there are Somalis living in the city involved in its smuggling and trading. "We sometimes intervene against khat," said Nilsson, "but there are many more seizures of cannabis, amphetamine and cocaine."

<sup>196</sup> Figures given by Pernilla Nilsson. In 2010 and 2011, 480 hate crimes were reported in Malmö, of which 44 concerned anti-semitism and 23 Islamophobia. Only 2 percent of reports resulted in prosecution. See C. Fürstenberg, "Rekordmånga hatbrott" (Record in Hate Crime), *Sydsvenskan*, 7 January 2013, at [sydsvenskan.se/malmo/rekordmanga-hatbrott](http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/rekordmanga-hatbrott) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>197</sup> Swedish Police, *Inspektion av polismyndigheternas förmåga att upptäcka och utreda hatbrott* (Inspection of Police Authorities' Ability to Discover and Investigate Hate Crimes), 2013, pp.17-19, at [http://polisen.se/Global/www%20och%20Intrapolis/Rapporter-utredningar/01%20Polisen%20nationellt/Ovriga%20rapporter-utredningar/Inspektioner-tillsyns%20rapporter/2013/Ti%20llsynsrapport\\_4\\_Hatbrott\\_130411.pdf](http://polisen.se/Global/www%20och%20Intrapolis/Rapporter-utredningar/01%20Polisen%20nationellt/Ovriga%20rapporter-utredningar/Inspektioner-tillsyns%20rapporter/2013/Ti%20llsynsrapport_4_Hatbrott_130411.pdf) (accessed 22 August 2013).

<sup>198</sup> See [tullverket.se/download/18.6eba7d0b12f4dfc02bc800028/1302685934772/Seizure+Statistics+2010.pdf](http://tullverket.se/download/18.6eba7d0b12f4dfc02bc800028/1302685934772/Seizure+Statistics+2010.pdf); [http://www.tullverket.se/download/18.5c3ba5113c86e5a12030/1359538967635/Beslagsstatistik\\_jan\\_dec\\_2010\\_2012.pdf](http://www.tullverket.se/download/18.5c3ba5113c86e5a12030/1359538967635/Beslagsstatistik_jan_dec_2010_2012.pdf); [tullverket.se/download/18.7f666dc013f3d5de7081442/1375862705115/Beslagsstatistik\\_halfv%C3%A5r\\_2011\\_2013.pdf](http://tullverket.se/download/18.7f666dc013f3d5de7081442/1375862705115/Beslagsstatistik_halfv%C3%A5r_2011_2013.pdf) (accessed 22 August 2013).

<sup>199</sup> In 2010 11.2 tonnes and in 2011 16.4 tonnes were seized in Malmö. See [tullverket.se/download/18.47cb27df1345aa2288180002685/1326887750745/Malm%C3%B6\\_jan-dec\\_2009-2011.pdf](http://tullverket.se/download/18.47cb27df1345aa2288180002685/1326887750745/Malm%C3%B6_jan-dec_2009-2011.pdf) (accessed 22 August 2013).

## 9.4 Positive View of Police

The focus group on policing was attended by 11 people, seven men and four women, ranging in age from 18 to 66 years.<sup>200</sup> None of them had any personal experience of crime, violence or talking to police officers on the streets of Malmö. Their knowledge of crime in Malmö came mostly from watching television. One participant had heard gunshots but did not know what had happened on that occasion. The general opinion seemed to be that some areas where immigrants cluster are quite safe, whereas other areas are less so. Rosengård was said to be pretty safe, Sofielund pretty violent. Someone launched the hypothesis that areas with many different immigrant groups are calmer than those with a few dominating groups.

Most participants seemed to have a positive view of the police force. “I have no problem with the police,” declared a retired man. “It feels safe when you see a policeman in the street,” added a woman. On the question of a racist statement (“damned monkey”) by a police officer in connection with earlier riots in Rosengård, opinions were somewhat divided. Someone said that trust in the police is reduced when something like that happens. Most participants, however, said they had not heard about the statement and if they had heard something they did not care much about it.

A young woman said that young people are angry at the police and fire brigade since they believe it takes 30 minutes for these forces to appear when something happens in an area where immigrants live, whereas it takes only five minutes in a wealthy area like Limhamn. Most participants had no opinion in this regard, since they had no experience of how fast police cars or fire engines appear at the scene of a crime or a fire.

Somali parents are not particularly worried about their children being involved in criminal youth gangs, according to the participants in this focus group discussion. There are youth gangs, but no Somali gangs, according to these 11 participants. However, it was also said that parents seldom know if their kids get into trouble with the police. There are “night wanderers” (civilians living in the neighbourhood) in the streets of Rosengård, two of whom are Somalis, looking out for youth in trouble.

A comparison was made between policemen in Sweden and Somalia. In Somalia, when people start quarrelling, a police officer rapidly intervenes and tries to calm the situation. In Sweden, it generally takes too long for the police to step in, although sometimes the police intervene too fast, not understanding what the row is about. A suggestion put forward in the discussion was to import a model from San Diego, according to which older Somali men are summoned by the police to solve internal Somali conflicts.

Police officers in Sweden are recruited from a diversity perspective: they are supposed to mirror society. However, recruitment takes place at a national not a local level. If

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<sup>200</sup> Open Society Foundation focus group on policing and security, 22 October 2012.

there were some police officers of Somali background they could perhaps calm things down in Malmö just as they do in Somalia, but so far there are no such officers. One participant, a young man, 18 years old, said he was thinking about becoming a police officer. His motivation was partly that the job is interesting, partly that he would be able to do some good in a neighbourhood where many Somalis live.

## 9.5 Summary

Among Somalis, Sweden is generally perceived to be a safe country. However, some areas have their fair share of trouble and crime. The Seved neighbourhood is such a troubled area in Malmö, plagued by a gang of young criminals. Somalis seem to have been able to keep out of the line of fire, sticking to their own associations and minding their own business.

Hate crimes in Malmö are primarily directed at Jews, followed by Muslims and Africans.

The Öresund Bridge is the main route for smuggling khat into Sweden but in Malmö other drugs are seized by the police to a larger extent than khat.

Among focus group discussants the general opinion was that some districts where many immigrants live are pretty safe (Rosengård) whereas others (Seved) are more violent. Most discussants seemed to have a positive view of the police, with some concerns about response times.



## 10. PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

In many countries Somalis are known as diligent organisation builders. In the U.K., Canada and the United States there is an array of Somali service organisations. Not so in Sweden. In Sweden and Malmö there are many Somali associations. They are in many cases the seeds of service organisations, but there is no fertile ground in which they can take root and grow, since social services are to be handled by public authorities and organisations (which Somalis often mistrust). This section will look into Somali community/service organisations and associations, Somali perceptions of authorities, citizenship and political participation.

Seven participants, four men and three women, the youngest 32 and the oldest 65, gathered to discuss participation and citizenship.<sup>201</sup> All four men and one woman were members of Somali associations; two of them in fact worked for such associations. Through these associations they interact with schools, the Employment Service and the Social Insurance Agency and with different projects.

### 10.1 What Community Organisations Can Do

The public sector is supposed to meet the needs of and address the problems people have, and to rapidly guide each new arrival (sharing nothing in common) through ready-made channels into Swedish society. In this context, immigrant associations are expected to confine themselves to cultural issues.

Existing research shows, however, that given the opportunity, Somali diaspora communities organise themselves in order to navigate in their new environment. These organisational endeavours take the shape of associations and community, information, business or service centres. Their purposes could be described in terms of social capital: to reconstruct Somali networks (bonding), to transmit contacts with other groups (bridging) and to form institutions (linking) in the new host society.<sup>202</sup>

Organisations of this kind can offer advantages for immigrants, especially for new arrivals. They can inform people who have not yet learnt the local language and institutions of the new country, they can offer tailor-made economic and social services, they can help people preserve their culture and religion, they can offer comfort and security, they can offer networks which may open opportunities, they can represent their members or “clients” before politicians, authorities and companies. However, they can also exert control over and screen off people from the rest of society and create permanent dependency, whether intentionally or otherwise.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on participation and citizenship, 23 October 2012.

<sup>202</sup> R. Tuck, “Asylum and the path to citizenship: a case study of Somalis in the United Kingdom”, *UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research*, Research Paper No. 210, 2011, pp. 15–19.

<sup>203</sup> Carlson et al., *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden*, p. 147.

Somali organisations in many countries, including Sweden, are small and compete for the same resources. This fragmentation can arise from clan divisions, internal strife in Somalia, and sometimes from individual Somalis seeking to create work opportunities for themselves by forming their own organisations.<sup>204</sup> There is no shortage of Somali organisations – or at least associations – in Sweden,<sup>205</sup> but their presence is not powerful.

Experiences from the UK, Canada and the United States show that the whole context changes when community organisations start to deliver tangible services – “the one who delivers will survive”.<sup>206</sup>

According to Abdalla Jama from the NGO Hodi, the City wants to do everything itself and is unwilling to let any other actors on to the scene; the situation in this respect is very different in Stockholm. He argues that Somali associations help their members solve many practical problems and that they should be supported by the state and the municipality.

The general opinion among participants in the focus group discussion was that Somali associations could do much more if given appropriate resources. One woman, with experiences from Canada, said that associations in Sweden cannot offer the same kind of services as associations in Canada because in Sweden they do not have the resources to employ educated and skilled people.

## 10.2 Somali Associations as Bridge-builders

The basic document from 1999, outlining an integration strategy for immigrants in Malmö, says that “the ethnic diversity of the population will set its stamp on our culture and affect the development of Swedish society” and that immigrant associations

<sup>204</sup> J. Griffiths, “Fragmentation and Consolidation: The contrasting Cases of Somali and Kurdish Refugees in London”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13 (3) (2000), pp. 287, 294, 297; G. Hopkins, “Somali Community Organizations in London and Toronto: Collaboration and Effectiveness”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19 (3) 2006, pp. 371, 377 (hereafter, Hopkins, “Somali Community Organizations in London and Toronto”).

<sup>205</sup> In Stockholm alone there are hundreds of Somali associations, some of which are allegedly used “to play games of cards and reproduce old norms and values from the home country”. See Q. Dayib, “Somaliska föreningar i Sverige främjar inte integrationen” (Somali Associations in Sweden do not Foster Integration), at [brinkemobloggen](http://brinkemobloggen.com), 2010, at [brinkemo.blogspot.se/?p=196](http://brinkemo.blogspot.se/?p=196) (accessed 3 August 2012).

<sup>206</sup> Interviews with Jawaahir Daahir, founder and managing director of Somali Development Services in Leicester, UK, 13 April 2012, and with Abdirizak Karod, executive director of Somali Centre for Family Services, Ottawa, Canada, 22 November 2011. Both leaders used the same words independently of each other. For comparison of Somalis in the labour market and their organisational endeavours in the UK, Canada and the United States, see Carlson et al., *Somalier på arbetsmarknaden*, pp. 140, 143.

have an important function to “communicate information about Swedish society and therewith function as a bridge in the contacts with various public institutions”.<sup>207</sup>

Melander’s research on strategies among Somalis in Sweden suggests that the government should fund Somalis to act as bridge-builders between Somali associations and Swedish society. They should, however, not be employed by the social welfare authorities since that would remind people of control and authorities.<sup>208</sup> A common term for people doing this is link worker.<sup>209</sup> Johnsdotter follows the same line of thought:

The *link work* carried out by many Swedish-Somali actors ... is invaluable in a wider perspective. Efforts made in different fields are outside of the public sector domain but indispensable for processes leading towards integration ... More refugees than ever receive permits of residence in Sweden and have a difficult time behind – and in the worst case a very long and difficult road ahead towards integration in Sweden. Here established Somalis could play an enormously important role in facilitating the life and orientation towards Swedish society for new arrivals.<sup>210</sup>

In an interview Johnsdotter added that associations can hardly move into any kind of innovative operations as they do not have the resources to do so. Their time is often taken up in addressing some of the everyday problems Somalis face. Johnsdotter was very critical of the project industry, where innumerable projects are started and, as soon as they show results, shut down.<sup>211</sup>

As we have seen (section 3), the official Swedish integration policy says that “[s]elective measures towards foreign-born as a group must not be taken after the first period of time in Sweden”. However, as this report on Somalis in Malmö and hundreds of years of experiences from major immigration countries demonstrate, a group of foreign-born may have many issues in common for a long time. These issues are normally dealt with by the “project industry”. This basically means that the government looks the other way as long as these projects are not taking on a permanent nature.

Per Brinkemo, active in the Somaliland Association in Malmö, observed that Swedish society is characterised by “a childish belief” that people from countries like Somalia

<sup>207</sup> City of Malmö, *Action Plan 1999*.

<sup>208</sup> Melander, *Inom transnationella och lokala sociala världar*, pp. 258–259.

<sup>209</sup> S. Ewert, M. Liedholm and G. Lindberg, “Linkworker-överbryggare, ett nödvändigt inslag i framgångsrika integrationsprojekt” (Link Workers – a Necessary Component of Successful Integration Projects), 2004, at <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=527784&fileOId=624101> (accessed 29 July 2012).

<sup>210</sup> Johnsdotter, *Somaliska föreningar som överbryggare*, p. 65.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Sara Johnsdotter, 14 December 2012.

automatically can understand the social rules in Sweden. He argues for a greater contribution by Somali associations in providing information to new arrivals:

Municipalities should offer information on society through ethnic associations since I am convinced that compatriots most often are better than Swedish officials in conveying information in a way that is understandable and at the right level.<sup>212</sup>

However, he also sees the need for partnership, support and participation by other Swedes:

In each such association there must also be Swedes, to prevent the associations from becoming isolated ethnic islands. Municipalities must also have insight into activities and follow what happens in the associations closely. They must ensure that right kind of information reaches the new arrivals.

Fuad Sharif's examination of how Somalis in Sweden – basically Malmö – perceive integration, comes to a similar conclusion:

I believe there is a gap when it comes to exploring the possibility that tailor-made group solutions could alleviate common shared problems regarding integration and hence facilitate the settlement process ... A newly-arrived immigrant could obtain information about the host society's social and economic structures, rules, regulations, and social codes from his community in a way he/she understands and could relate to. Hence, these networks could be considered a form of parallel institutions that could assist immigrants in their cultural integration.<sup>213</sup>

These parallel institutions seem to be much needed by Somalis, since Sharif notes that a recurrent theme among his Somali respondents is “the profound mistrust regarding the different Swedish institutions and authorities”. He even notes that there “appears to be a common conviction that there is a conspiracy against Somalis as well as a lack of dialogue with authorities”.

However, he too argues for the need for such associations to work in cooperation and with the support of other actors in society. He finds that the approach of Somalis relying on other Somalis for information “tends to increase disinformation and false rumours”. Sharif's male respondents also found Somali community organisations were not able to provide or facilitate access to valuable social networks since most members

<sup>212</sup> P. Brinkemo, “Kunskapen om Sverige ytterst dålig bland alltför många med utländsk härkomst” (Knowledge of Sweden Very Poor among Too Many of Foreign Descent), *Newsmill*, 2011, at [newsmill.se/print/26743](http://newsmill.se/print/26743) (accessed 29 July 2012).

<sup>213</sup> F. M. Sharif, “Integration in Perspective”, pp. 2, 13. In his conclusion (p. 29) Sharif reverts to the same theme: “Hence, a sizeable gap seems to have ensued between the collectively-oriented informal structures of the Somalis and the formalized as well as individual-based structures that prevail in Sweden.”

“are unemployed and discussions are more about Somali politics than (about) Sweden”<sup>214</sup>.

The participants in the Open Society Foundations focus groups seemed to think that leaders of these associations could represent them to the authorities. On the question whether there had been some change in leadership over the years from a more traditional to a more modern style, no clear answer emerged. Participants were (with one exception) not involved in any non-Somali association.

The need for diversity in the structure of Swedish authorities was noted by some of the Somali civil society activists. Abdulfatah Warsame noted that the major problem for the Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture (*Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*, SKKF) is that there are no personal or direct relationships with individuals in the authorities. He notes that other ethnic groups have their own people working in different authorities, but not the Somalis. Such individuals, while working as professionals, also provide a contact and route for communication with key institutions. There is a need for Somali employees in each of four authorities: the City and the social insurance, employment and tax agencies. Hashim Abdikarem also noted that there are often Arabic-speaking but not Somali-speaking employees at social welfare and health-care centres.

### 10.3 The Somali Information and Business Centre

What have authorities done? As mentioned in section 3, Partnership Skåne has launched two important projects for Somalis in Malmö. First, the partnership is employing two Somali community and health information officers who have regular meetings with new arrivals. One of them was interviewed as a key practitioner for section 5 on education. Second is the creation of a regional Somali Information and Business Centre (SIBC), which was launched in 2012, and operates in Malmö, Kristianstad and Eslöv. It is administered by the Herbert Felix Institute and funded by a number of actors: the European Social Fund, the Skåne County Administrative Board, Skåne Regional Council, the Cities of Malmö, Kristianstad and Eslöv and the National Employment Service. The policy behind these initiatives is revealed in a document from the County Administrative Board:

We think that immigrants do not form a homogenous entity but need complementary methods to make the establishment phase in Sweden more efficient. The impact of perceptions, conditions, norms and organisation within different groups upon the integration process must be taken into account and

<sup>214</sup> Sharif, “Integration in Perspective”, pp. 16, 18, 23.

respected. Somalis in Sweden are in a particularly exposed situation and are therefore in need of different problem-solving.<sup>215</sup>

It was a Somali employee at the County Board who originally brought up the idea of a Somali centre funded by authorities. The process leading up to its establishment was troublesome, according to Katarina Carlzén, head of Partnership Skåne; there was resistance towards the idea from the City of Malmö but not among the other cities or authorities. The centre mainly focuses on giving advice to prospective entrepreneurs, but Carlzén hopes that it will in the future also focus more on different interventions for new arrivals:

People must have the chance to understand a new and often very different society. There is a need for an arena where people can discuss these things in detail, a need for study circles on different themes which can be connected to the existing civic information for new arrivals.<sup>216</sup>

It was initially difficult to create trust between authorities and centre on the one hand, and the about 20 Somali associations in Skåne on the other. However, in the summer of 2013, after a roundtable dialogue between representatives of authorities and associations, most antagonisms and misconceptions were eliminated. Since then, a majority of Somali associations formed an umbrella organisation and two Somali representatives have joined the SIBC steering committee. This centre now has the ability to serve as a bridge between authorities and Somalis and their associations.

#### 10.4 Support from the City of Malmö for Somali Associations

The City of Malmö has over the years taken certain measures specifically aimed at Somalis. For instance, the City invested in a three-month educational and training programme about Swedish society at Malmö University, which was delivered to 11 Somalis who were to be key community informants. The aim was for these informants to be active in various Somali associations. However, there were no funds for them to do this. Even so, some of them are still working, at least in the Somaliland Association. There are also small short-term grants to Somali associations for example for funding clothing for a Somali youth football team and subsidies for Somali youngsters from Malmö visiting a Nordic Somali Youth Summit. Associations can borrow premises from the municipality for meetings free of charge.

Furthermore, the City cooperates with some Somali associations on different projects. Somalis bring forth ideas and the City handles the applications and acts as underwriter and co-financier. Projects in the making in the spring of 2013 dealt with change of

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<sup>215</sup> "Diskussionsunderlag för projekt: Integrationsmodell för somalier i Skåne" (Basis for Project Discussion: Integration Model for Somalis in Skåne), undated document from the Skåne County Administrative Board.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with Katarina Carlzén, 18 December 2012.

lifestyle among Somali women to reduce obesity and activities for Somali asylum-seeking unaccompanied children.<sup>217</sup>

As Hjalmar Falck, programme coordinator in the Seved neighbourhood characterised it, the Somali associations are somewhat different from most other immigrant associations. They are not as eager to get economic support from the City at any price. They wish to have the City as a long-term partner but at the same time safeguard their own “trademark”. Falck also noted that Somali associations are open and friendly and therefore their premises are sometimes used when open meetings are organised in the neighbourhood.

### 10.5 Somali Perceptions of Authorities

Experiences and perceptions of cooperation with and support from the city administration and other authorities varied across the different Somali civil society organisations that were interviewed for this report.

A significant number of interviewees were negative in their perception of support from the city administration. Both Ahmed Weli from the Afro-European Association and Ahmed Moalim from Siman concluded that they often turn to the City, but the City never turns to them. It is a one-sided process and they would like to have more exchanges with and information from the City. Jama Osman from the Somaliland Association confirmed this picture. He did not see any differences in the attitudes of different authorities. The differences were between individuals at different authorities. “You have to keep calling until you find someone who is helpful.” “We are actually working as an authority”, Osman continued, “but without their resources. We are solving a lot of practical problems that would otherwise have to be dealt with by authorities.” According to Abdalla Jama, there is a mutual understanding between Hodi and the Employment Service but virtually no relations with the City administration.

Abdulfatah Warsame noted that the major problem for the SKKF is that there are no personal or direct relationships with individuals in the authorities; other ethnic groups have their own people working in different authorities, but not Somalis. There is a need for Somali employees in each of four authorities: the City, Social Insurance, Employment and Tax agencies. Hashim Abdikarem also noted that there are often Arabic-speaking but not Somali-speaking employees at social welfare and health-care centres.

Other Somali civil society activities reported more positive experiences. Warsame Osman from Hidde Iyo Dhaqan indicated that the dialogue with the City works well, not least since a programme area coordinator was appointed by the City (see section 7), serving as a link between Somalis and authorities. “We are working quite closely now. Before there was more top-down ruling.” Hashim Abdikarem also stated that Somali

<sup>217</sup> Meeting with Andreas Konstantinides, 4 April 2013.

Peace cooperates well with most authorities, although it is seldom in touch with the Rosengård city district administration.

During the short existence of Women2Women Fozia Slone and Muna Mohamed have found that dealing with authorities can be quite complicated. When they applied for a subsidy to send 10 youngsters to a Nordic Somali Youth Summit in Stockholm in 2013 (see above), their application was put on hold in one city district but immediately approved when they turned to another district.

## 10.6 Citizenship

The Integration Board noted Somalis' problems getting Swedish citizenship; this was because after the collapse of the Somali state they had difficulties fulfilling the demands for documentation. Legislation from 1999, however, made it possible for them to get Swedish citizenship after having lived eight years in the country.<sup>218</sup>

According to Table 11 somewhat less than one-third of Somalis in Sweden have Swedish citizenship. The share is larger in the big cities, especially in Stockholm. Malmö stands out since a considerable share of Somalis, almost one out of 10, has Danish citizenship, which means that more than 100 Somalis have moved from Denmark to Malmö.

**Table 11. Citizenship of Somalia-born aged 16–64 (%), 2010**

Citizenship	Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	All Sweden
Somalia	48	57	49	68
Sweden	51	43	42	30
Denmark	0	0	9	1
Other	1	1	1	1
Total	100	101	101	100

**Note:** Some totals do not add to 100 due to rounding

**Source:** Statistics Sweden

The young Somali introduction guides who discussed their work in the employment sector (see section 6) were upset about the delay for Somalis wishing to get Swedish citizenship caused by their not having the requisite identity documents. “It is a collective punishment,” said Omar Adam, remarking that stateless people have to wait four years whereas people from a collapsed state have to wait eight years. Fuad Sharif framed the process as hypocrisy: “I have permanent residence and the government is

<sup>218</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 18.



investing in me but when it comes to citizenship and passport they do not believe in me – it just doesn't add up." The rule means that Somalis are trapped in Sweden for eight years and cannot go anywhere else to find a job.<sup>219</sup>

Participants in the focus groups complained about this and contrasted the UK and the United States, where the waiting time is five years. They all wanted to become Swedish citizens, particularly since citizenship would give them the freedom to move around the world. They all wanted to go back to Somalia if and when the country becomes safe and peaceful. Their impression was that most older people would return to Somalia since they were not able to get a foothold in Sweden, whereas young Somalis born and raised in Sweden would not return.

### 10.7 The Importance of Political Participation

The limited space in the Swedish welfare state for immigrants to take care of their own economic and social needs and problems increases the need for immigrants to organise politically, so as to be able to influence the supply of benefits and services delivered by the welfare state. Here Somalis have been fairly active. As early as the 1999 report from the Integration Board, it was clear that "One expression of the participation of Somalis in society is that they, in spite of the short time in Sweden, have entered into the political arena. There are Somali members in regional, municipal and district councils, representing several different parties."<sup>220</sup> In Malmö, at least two Somalis have been active in politics at the city level.<sup>221</sup>

Only two participants in the Open Society Foundations focus groups were Swedish citizens and thus allowed to vote in national elections. They had both voted three times. None of the other participants had voted. They had only been in Sweden for three or four years. An immigrant can vote in municipal elections after having been registered in Sweden for three continuous years. The political leanings in this group were clearly in favour of the Social Democrats, with one participant active in a Social Democratic local association. One had voted for the Conservative party (the Moderates).

New arrivals get information on Swedish politics through SFI courses. Most participants said they watch TV and read free newspapers such as *Metro* and *City*. They also share information in regular discussions. "Somalis like politics," exclaimed one man and continued: "We go back and forth between Somali and Swedish politics." Another man replied: "We are doing them in parallel."

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Omar Adam and Fuad Sharif, 14 December 2012.

<sup>220</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 50.

<sup>221</sup> The two, both active Social Democrats, are Mubarik Abdirahman (see section 5) and Abdiwahab Ugaas Khalif, who in 2011–2012 was minister of trade and industry, and deputy prime minister, in Somalia. See E. Magnusson, "Jag vill förena det bästa av två världar" (I Want to Combine the Best of Two Worlds), *Sydsvenskan*, 11 January 2013, at [sydsvenskan.se/varlden/jag-vill-forena-det-basta-av-tva-varldar](http://sydsvenskan.se/varlden/jag-vill-forena-det-basta-av-tva-varldar) (accessed 19 December 2013).

## 10.8 Summary

Somalis are known for organising themselves through associations and centres so as to be able to navigate the new environments. Community organisations have many advantages for immigrants, but also some drawbacks. There is no lack of Somali associations in Sweden but their presence is not powerful since the public sector is supposed to take care of most needs and problems people face.

Many activists and researchers with insights into the situation for Somalis in Sweden have argued for a larger role for associations, service centres and Somalis with a firm foothold in Sweden (link workers, bridge-builders) to assist new arrivals and others who have not been able to find their place in Swedish society. Some experiments along these lines have been made. Two Somali information officers are employed by the Partnership Skåne and a regional Somali Information and Business Centre was launched in 2012. The City of Malmö has invested in the education of 11 Somali informants, co-sponsored a Somali psychologist and continuously cooperates with some Somali associations in different projects.

Somali association leaders assess their relations with authorities as mostly one-sided; they turn to authorities for information and help but authorities seldom approach them to hear what they need.

Focus group participants related their experiences getting help from Somali associations to solve practical problems. The general opinion was that these associations could do much more if given appropriate resources.

30 percent of Somalis in Sweden have Swedish citizenship, although in Malmö the figure is about 40 percent. It takes eight years to be able to apply for Swedish citizenship. This is a source of great frustration for Somalis. Being a Swedish citizen is highly desirable since it opens the possibility to travel, even to leave Sweden.

## 11. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Somalis in many countries feel that they are negatively portrayed by the media, and find only disturbing news about Somalia and Somalis. These complaints about the media picture in Sweden are not new. They were listed in the 1999 report from the Integration Board: “Somalis thought that newspapers basically only highlighted difficulties and problems and that they were portrayed as a very different group.” The board itself examined some 60 articles about Somalis in Swedish newspapers and found that about half of them were of a positive and the other half of a negative character.<sup>222</sup>

### 11.1 A Collection of Bad News

Somalis’ apprehension of a negative media picture has to some extent been nourished by some major articles in the Gothenburg daily *Göteborgs-Posten* in 2007, where Somalis were described as a group on the road to destruction. These articles pointed to a series of real problems, but the massive collection of bad news upset many Somalis. The opening of the main article was dramatic:

A people with a thousand year history is on its way to perish. Right among us. In Gothenburg 2007. At the top of the list of those guilty are Somali dads who abandon their families. The Swedish welfare society and the closed labour market contribute to the disaster, which can be seen in serious crime, widespread drug abuse, welfare cheating, low grades from school, broken families and sky-high unemployment.<sup>223</sup>

The statistics presented were also dramatic: Every second Somali woman did not live with the father of her children. Only three out of 10 Somali youngsters had complete grades from primary school. One out of five young Somali men was under the suspicion of having committed a crime of violence. Almost 50 percent of Somalis had no work income whatsoever.

These articles triggered a massive reaction. Some Swedes applauded the paper for highlighting these problems. The reactions among Somalis varied; some thought it was worthwhile to draw attention to real problems, some asked why nothing had been written about successful Somalis, some were upset and thought the paper had painted a whole group of people in negative terms.<sup>224</sup> An article in response argued that the newspaper had made it even more difficult for Somalis to get into the labour and

<sup>222</sup> Integration Board, *Delaktighet för integration*, p. 26.

<sup>223</sup> C. Lövkvist, “Göteborgs somalier – ett folk i kris” (Somalis in Gothenburg – A People in Crisis), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 28 October 2007, at [gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.115816-28-10-07-goteborgs-somalier-ett-folk-i-kris](http://gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.115816-28-10-07-goteborgs-somalier-ett-folk-i-kris) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>224</sup> C. Lövkvist, “Somaliaartiklar engagerar läsarna” (Articles on Somalis Engage Readers), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 30 October 2007, at [gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.115820-30-10-07-somaliaartiklar-engager-ar-lasarna](http://gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.115820-30-10-07-somaliaartiklar-engager-ar-lasarna) (accessed 19 December 2013).

housing markets and that discrimination against Somalis could be expected to increase.<sup>225</sup> Some 30 Somalis demonstrated outside the newspaper office.<sup>226</sup>

## 11.2 Local Newspaper Articles

The major newspaper in Malmö, *Sydsvenskan*, mentioned Somalis in some local context in 26 articles during the years 2010–2012, of which 16 were of some interest (meaning that Somalis were not just referred to in passing). These articles (listed in Appendix 3) covered a range of issues, including Swedish-Somali views on terrorism legislation, Somalis as victims of crime, perspectives on integration, and several featuring the accomplishments and activities of Somalis in Malmö.

There is some focus on bad news, such as terrorism and famine in Somalia. These are plain facts and news that should be brought to the attention of the general public. However, almost all articles with some local Malmö connection have a positive touch: Somalis condemn Al Shabaab, Somalis do an important job at the Red Cross, the minister of integration visits Somalis in Malmö, a man from Malmö becomes a minister in Somalia, a man helps children with homework, Somalis celebrate their national holiday with a Swedish touch to it.

That news from Somalia is mostly negative – dealing with hunger, violence and piracy – is a separate issue; after all Somalis seek refuge in Sweden to escape such situations. Some Somalis are concerned that when the general public reads about bad things in Somalia, it consciously or not associates these things with Somalis in Sweden. In that case, articles like some of those mentioned, where Somalis in the diaspora disassociate themselves from things happening in Somalia, should have the effect of counteracting any spill-over effect.

## 11.3 Journalists' and Leaders' Views

Two of the most well-known and experienced reporters at *Sydsvenskan* are Olle Lönnaeus and Erik Magnusson, who both have written many articles dealing with Somali issues, although mostly at a national or international level.<sup>227</sup>

“If we write about Somalis, our point of departure is not to do something good or bad for Somalis but to write about what is relevant from a journalistic point of view,” according to Lönnaeus. “This is the only possible stance one can take as a journalist. If you start thinking about consequences, you will be part of the case instead of an

<sup>225</sup> Y. Elmi and A. Hassan, “Vi efterlyser en konstruktiv debatt” (We Want a Constructive Debate), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 20 November 2007, at [gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.120924-vi-efterlyser-en-konstruktiv-debatt](http://gp.se/nyheter/debatt/1.120924-vi-efterlyser-en-konstruktiv-debatt) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>226</sup> A. Johansson, “Somalier i protest mot GP” (Somalis Protesting against GP), *Göteborgs-Posten*, 23 November 2007, at [gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.102501-23-11-07-somalier-i-protest-mot-gp](http://gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/1.102501-23-11-07-somalier-i-protest-mot-gp) (accessed 19 December 2013).

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Olle Lönnaeus and Erik Magnusson, 21 November 2012.

observer and reporter.” Their guiding principle is to write in a way that is neutral regarding consequences.

Both reporters readily acknowledged that media in general (not particularly concerning Somalis) may have a kind of negative bias, in that dramatic events like accidents and acts of violence get more attention than less dramatic developments like building schools or fighting diseases: “Yes, journalism is oriented towards problems and it follows a certain dramaturgy.” Erik Magnusson explained succinctly: “If there is peace in Somalia, Somalia will slowly be less newsworthy.”

Olle Lönnaeus added that his newspaper has a diversity goal: to mirror the demographic composition of the society in which it is situated. Since there are quite a few Somalis in Malmö there should be an ambition to mirror their lives in the paper.

Leaders of Somali civil society groups interviewed for this report commented upon the role of the media. Warsame Osman of the Hidde Iyo Dhaqan did not see any particularly negative treatment of Somalis in the media: “If you do something sensible, media will be interested. Why should media be interested if people just hang around in a basement?” Abdalla Jama concluded that the media have a negative bias in general, since that sort of news sells, but it is not directed towards Somalis in particular. “You have to be active and use media to get your own perspective through.”<sup>228</sup>

#### 11.4 Somali Media

One means to improve the balance of reporting on the Somali diaspora could be for Somalis themselves to increase their participation on the media scene. In Minneapolis, the Somali “capital” of North America, for example, there is more or less a Somali media industry.<sup>229</sup> In Sweden there are also after all several different Somali media. Swedish Radio International broadcasts news in Somali and employs a couple of Somali reporters. *Somaliska* is the largest online newspaper in Sweden. In Stockholm (as in several other cities), local cable TV programmes are distributed through the open channel and four of these programmes are produced by Somalis.<sup>230</sup> In Gothenburg one web radio programme, *Somaliweyn*, and one news magazine, *Somalitimes*, are produced. In 2013 a newspaper, *Zamman News*, was launched in Katrineholm. In Malmö, no Somali TV or radio programmes or magazines seem to be produced. However, some international TV channels like Universal TV and Somaliland National TV have offices in nearby Copenhagen.

<sup>228</sup> Interviews with Warsame Osman, 3 December 2012, and Abdalla Jama, 5 December 2012.

<sup>229</sup> B. Carlson, “In the Service of Community: Somali Media in the Twin Cities”, *American Studies in Scandinavia* 42 (2) (2010).

<sup>230</sup> The four TV programmes are East African TV, Somali Star TV, TH Horseed and TV Somaliland.

### 11.5 Strong Opinions

The focus group on the role of the media comprised six men and two women.<sup>231</sup> The youngest participant (a woman) was 19, the oldest (a man) in his 70s. The discussion revealed that Somalis in Malmö consume news through a number of channels: Al Jazeera, the major Swedish TV channels (two public service channels, TV1 and 2, and one commercial channel, TV4), Somali cable TV channels, English language newspapers, Swedish local newspapers (mainly *Metro*, which is handed out free, and the largest local newspaper in Malmö, *Sydsvenskan*), the internet and word of mouth. Older people, with a limited command of the English and Swedish languages, mostly consume Somali cable TV.

Most participants in the discussion had strong opinions about media: Al Jazeera was perceived as the only news channel that “tells about reality” in a balanced way, reporting on bad as well as good things. Opinions on Swedish media ranged from rather balanced – TV – to very unbalanced – evening newspapers which aim to attract readers with sensational headlines. One man made the following analysis:

Newspapers are business organisations. They want drama to get an audience to buy their news. There is competition between journalists in each media and competition between different media to get the most exciting news out. That’s why we only hear about war and never about peaceful farming in Iraq.

The younger participants were particularly critical of Swedish media. One young woman claimed that “everything they write about immigrants is negative” and even that everything is negative about anyone not being “blonde and blue-eyed”. A young man figured that media judge all Somalis alike as unemployed rather than individuals. They also agreed that only negative reports from Somalia about pirates and terrorists were considered news by the media.

The older participants of 50 years of age and above had a less harsh view of Swedish media, although they did not consume as much as the younger ones. The oldest participant reckoned that some negative news from Somalia originates from Somalis themselves. Some Somalis are interested in spreading the message that everything is chaos in Somalia in order to open the gates of immigration to Sweden. People are using information to achieve different goals.

When asked about some examples of negative reporting on Somalis in Sweden, an article in an evening newspaper was vaguely recalled. The young woman said she had wanted to get the local media interested in covering a couple of events, among them a demonstration in Malmö by Somali asylum seekers, but to no avail. Another young man told the story of how he and some friends were abused by a newspaper:

One weekend, a group of us, people from different countries, all working people, sat at a café drinking coffee. After a while a photographer showed up and

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<sup>231</sup> 11 September 2012.

wanted to take a picture. He took his picture and next day we were portrayed in a newspaper. The story in the article was about unemployed people addicted to khat. We turned to the newspaper to complain and they said they were sorry and would explain that the picture had nothing to do with the story. As usual this correction was not easy to be seen or found, only three or four lines in the paper.

## 11.6 Summary

Somalis often – not only in Sweden – claim to be negatively portrayed in the media. A survey of recent articles on Somalis in the chief newspaper in Malmö, *Sydsvenskan*, does not confirm this claim. There is, of course, bad news, mostly about what happens in Somalia, but almost all articles with some local connection have a positive touch. There might, however, be a spill-over effect in that the general public associates bad news from Somalia with Somalis living in the diaspora.

Journalists at *Sydsvenskan*, who have written extensively on topics related to Somalia or Somalis, follow, as most journalists do, the principle of being neutral regarding consequences in order to be able to observe and report, not advocate.

Most participants in the focus group on media had strong opinions. They viewed Al Jazeera as the only news channel which tells about reality in a balanced way. Younger participants were more negative towards Swedish media than older ones.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

There are roughly 1,500 individuals born in Somalia living in Malmö, half of which came to Sweden since 2006. Almost 80 percent live in three city districts. Somalis in Malmö are young, with 70 percent of those above 16 years of age under 40 years old. Educational levels are low: 64 percent have primary or unknown education. Only 21 percent have employment and only 0.7 percent are self-employed.

Somalis in general seem to like living in Malmö. It is a city where roughly 30 percent of the population was born abroad, and many are Muslims. This creates a feeling of freedom and being at home. On the other hand, the labour market is less favourable in Malmö than in other large cities. Some have suggested that there is greater religious tolerance and that the cost of living is lower than in Stockholm and Gothenburg.

A basic document from 1999, outlining a strategy for immigrants in Malmö, says that “the ethnic diversity of the population will set its stamp on our culture and affect the development of Swedish society” and that immigrant associations have an important function to “communicate information about Swedish society and therewith function as a bridge in the contacts with various public institutions”. The question remains open whether this strategy is still in place. Senior officials in the City of Malmö appear to be reluctant to touch upon the subject of ethnic groups. According to some officials in the Rosengård district, “We are all Swedes”. This approach conforms to the Swedish government’s claim that “selective measures directed towards foreign-born as a group must not be taken after the first period of time in Sweden”. Integration is thus, from this perspective, an exclusively individual affair. However, at other government levels, the regional level and within the Employment Service as well as some City authorities, Somalis do exist and have some common experiences, needs and challenges that ought to be addressed.

There are a number of challenges that affect the integration and social inclusion of Somalis in Sweden: They have migrated from a society with a very different economic and social structure and above all from a context of a civil war with no functioning state institutions. This background means that to a large extent they have been deprived of education, professional careers and the habit of living in a society with properly functioning public institutions. They have had to find ways to survive as individuals and collective groups (families, clans). In Sweden, they are expected to set aside their habits and experiences in a very short time; they are supposed to learn the Swedish language, improve their education, go through vocational training, understand how the multitude of Swedish specialised authorities work and, above all, conform to the instructions given by these authorities. Every step of the way, their earlier experiences make it difficult for them to adapt smoothly to these demands. Some of the resources they have brought with them, such as the ability to form organisations and navigate a new environment collectively or the ability to start a small business on a short notice, are of little use in this new context.



The research for this report has identified some of the key concerns, experiences and priorities of Somalis in Malmö. The absence of so many Somalis from the labour market forms the black hole in their life in Sweden and very much so in Malmö. Unemployment produces low income, crowded apartments, doubts about the use of pursuing education, isolation and few opportunities to practise the Swedish language, low self-esteem and tensions between spouses and between parents and children. It creates a stigma and becomes self-fulfilling. New arrivals are met with a pessimistic message, and children who have seen their parents stranded may have doubts about their own future. Employers' attitudes may be affected. One could argue that there is a vicious circle or even a catch-22 facing Somalis in many areas of their life in Sweden.

To break this circle is not an easy thing. What Somalis in focus groups and Somali civil society activists identify as the greatest need is for more information about and connections with Swedish institutions and authorities. More information, not least information adapted to the needs of new arrivals, as well as information on Somali culture to Swedish authorities and employers, is crucial for Somalis to be able to move along on the path of integration – to access the Swedish language, educational system, labour market and society in general – and at the same time be respected for their desire to feel safe within their own community and free to practise their religion and culture.

## 13. RECOMMENDATIONS

Any recommendation to address key concerns, needs, challenges and barriers for Somalis in Malmö is in itself a challenge. Making the most of the Somali community's capacity to contribute both to resolving its own concerns and to enhance life in Malmö for all residents is essential, across every sector.

### 13.1 Identity and Belonging

- The City of Malmö and Malmö against Discrimination should work closely with Somali community and faith organisations to consider how mechanisms for challenging discrimination, support for Somalis using these mechanisms, and dissemination of information about these mechanisms could be improved.
- The City of Malmö should support Somali community and faith organisations to facilitate dialogue within the Somali community about the identity of Somalis in Sweden and issues such as clans, religion, inter-generational tensions and changing gender roles.
- The City of Malmö should work with immigrant community and faith organisations and mainstream civil society organisations to facilitate a dialogue about Swedish identity in an increasingly diverse society.

### 13.2 Education

- The City of Malmö should work with the Ministry of Education to study the experience of cities such as Oslo and London and develop a strategy for improving schools in districts with large immigrant populations; the strategy should consider measures such as improving information for families, strengthening parental engagement, providing more effective counselling, equal expectations for immigrant students, mentoring programmes and the role that faith and community organisations can play in raising educational attainment through homework support and other initiatives.
- The City of Malmö should work with mentoring organisations and Somali community and faith organisations to establish a mentoring programme for Somali youth aimed at expanding their networks and career horizons.

### 13.3 Employment

- The City of Malmö should work with Somali and other immigrant community organisations to better disseminate information about and create trust in the City's labour market programs.
- The City of Malmö should work with business organisations and personnel development organisations to review current equality and diversity practice and

improve or develop standards, guidance and training programmes to help avoid discrimination in recruitment and promotion.

- The City of Malmö should work with Somali and other immigrant organisations and experts to consider the feasibility of reducing language requirements for some jobs (as long as safety at work is not compromised) and subsidizing language support in the workplace as a means of increasing employment and employability among migrants.
- The Somali Information and Business Centre should consider access to credit as a crucial factor in promoting entrepreneurship and explore the feasibility of attracting providers of Islamic loans and micro-finance to improve access to credit for immigrant entrepreneurs.

#### **13.4 Housing**

- The City of Malmö should work with District Councils and civil society organisations to consider measures to ensure quality housing services for all, including a tenants charter, changes to the current complaints system to ensure that it is accessible to all tenants, improved guidelines and training on anti-discrimination and diversity for housing services staff and housing information that is accessible to all residents, including new arrivals.
- The City of Malmö should ensure that the Sustainable Malmö Strategy action on transparent housing allocations policy is implemented and the new policy is publicised through appropriate channels, including Somali community and faith organisations.
- The City of Malmö should study housing policy in cities such as Helsinki and consult with residents on possible changes in the planning and allocation of housing that would result in less ethnically segregated communities while respecting choice.

#### **13.5 Health and Social Protection**

- As part of its strategy for a socially sustainable Malmö, the City of Malmö, District Councils and health providers should work with Somali and other immigrant community organisations to review the accessibility and effectiveness of information and guidance for immigrants on health and social protection and take steps to strengthen the role of community and faith organisations in disseminating information and guidance.

#### **13.6 Policing and Security**

- As part of its strategy for a socially sustainable Malmö, the City of Malmö, District Councils and the police should work with Somali and other immigrant

community organisations and experts to ensure that mechanisms for engaging with residents are accessible to and used by Somalis and other residents of immigrant background.

### **13.7 Participation and Citizenship**

- The City of Malmö and other public authorities and service providers should consider a model that would give Somali and other immigrant community organisations a more robust role as a bridge between the authorities and immigrant communities, either by creating liaison officers, or developing community-based service organisations, or by building upon the existing area coordinator model. This would allow for an effective use of the expertise, knowledge, networks and commitment of Somali and other immigrant community organisations and experts in order to improve access to information and guidance, public services, and opportunities.

### **13.8 Media**

- The City of Malmö should encourage organisations of media professionals to set up a mentoring programme for staff and volunteers of Somali and other immigrant organisations that would enable them to cultivate media contacts and use these contacts to improve media coverage of immigrant issues.

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## ANNEX 2. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

In all, the interviews involved 51 respondents.

Abdikarem, Hashim, Chairman of Somali Peace (*Somaliska Freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen*), 16 May 2013.

Abdirahman, Mubarik, Informant on Health and Society from the Skåne County Administrative Board, 10 January 2013.

Abdulkader, Said, Chairman, of SKKF (Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture, *Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*), 13 December 2012.

Abrahamsson, Erik, Secretary of Somali Peace in Rosengård (*Somaliska Freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen*), 16 May 2013.

Adam, Omar, Introduction Guide at Etab Norr, 14 December 2012.

Ahlgren, Eva, Head of City District, Rosengård district, 19 November 2012.

Ahmed, Idris, Board Member, of SKKF (Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture, *Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*), 13 December 2012.

Aizi, Hadil, Labour Market Secretary at JobbMalmö, 14 June 2012.

Alriksson, Birgitta, Development Coordinator at the Education Department in Malmö, 9 January 2013.

Asplund, Barbara, Head of Immigrant Service, 3 December 2012.

Carlzén, Katarina, Head of Partnership Skåne, Skåne County Administrative Board, 18 December 2012.

Collin, Dan, Teacher at SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.

Dahlstedt, Inge, MIM Institute, Malmö University, 4 December 2012.

Ekdahl, Yassin, Psychologist at the Red Cross Centre for Treatment of War Wounded and Tortured in Malmö, 18 December 2012.

Ekström, Lars, Section Manager at JobbMalmö Work and Education Unit, 14 June 2012.

Falck, Hjalmar, Seved Area Coordinator, 5 December, 2012.

Hendra, Marie, Head of Culture and Leisure Department, Rosengård district, 19 November 2012.

Herstedt, Monika, Head of Activities at JobbMalmö, 11 May 2012.

Jama, Abdalla, Chairman of Hodi – Malmö, 5 December 2012.

Johnsdotter, Sara, Social Anthropologist, Professor at Malmö University, 14 December 2012.

Konstantinides, Andreas, Policy Officer at the City of Malmö Department of Integration and Employment, 12 February 2013.

- Lidforsen, Eva, Therapist and Physiotherapist, at the Red Cross Centre for Treatment of War Wounded and Tortured in Malmö, 18 December 2012.
- Lindborg, Jytte, Head of Educational Department, Rosengård district, 19 November 2012.
- Linder, Margareta, Principal of SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.
- Liveröd, Yerk, Principal of SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.
- Lönnaeus, Olle, Journalist at *Sydsvenskan*, 21 November 2012.
- Lundby, Christina, CEO of MKB housing districts, 8 October 2012.
- Magnusson, Erik, Journalist at *Sydsvenskan*, 21 November 2012.
- Moalim, Ahmed, Chairman of Siman, 27 November 2012.
- Mohamed, Muna, Contact Person, Woman2Woman Diaspora Action Group, 25 June 2013.
- Nilsson, Pernilla, Head of the Malmö Police City Area, 11 December 2012.
- Nuur, Mustafa, Introduction Guide at Etab Norr, 14 December 2012.
- O'Connor, Barbara, Head of the Red Cross Centre for Treatment of War Wounded and Tortured in Malmö, 18 December 2012.
- Olsson-Kulevska, Liselotte, Head of the Integration Unit at Swedish Public Employment Service, 20 June 2012.
- Osman Jama, Chairman of Somaliland Association, 4 December 2012.
- Osman, Warsame, Chairman of Hidde Iyo Dhaqan, 3 December 2012.
- Osman Yusof, Ali, Employee, of SKKF (Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture, *Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*), 13 December 2012.
- Palm, Eva, Immigrant Service Secretary, 3 December 2012.
- Persson, Kristina, Teacher at SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.
- Ransholm, Daniel, Immigrant Service Secretary, 3 December 2012.
- Rolfson, Margaretha, Sociologist of Law and Entrepreneur (RÄTSO project), 29 November 2012.
- Sharif, Fuad, Introduction Guide at Miroi, 14 December 2012.
- Slone, Fozia, Chairman, Woman2Woman Diaspora Action Group, 25 June 2013.
- Solid-Hersler, Marina, Teacher at SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.
- Ström, Jennie, Immigrant Service Secretary, 3 December 2012.
- Svensson, Pål, CEO of MKB Housing Districts, 8 October 2012.
- Swanstein, Filippa, Head of Malmö against Discrimination, 10 April 2013.
- Warsame, Abdulfatah, Secretary of SKKF (Sofielunds Association for the Promotion of Knowledge and Culture, *Sofielunds Kunskapsfrämjande och Kulturella Förening*), 13 December 2012.



Weli, Ahmed, Chairman of Afro-European Association, 27 November 2012.

Westerlund, Ewa, Immigrant Service Secretary, 3 December 2012.

Yusuf, Maxamed, Teacher at SFI Komvux Södervärn, 14 May 2012.

## ANNEX 3. ARTICLES IN SYDSVENSKAN, 2010–2012

1. Swedish-Somalis want tougher legislation against terrorism. Farah Abdisamad, chairman of the Somali National Association (*Somaliska riksförbundet*), says the laws against terrorism must be tougher to put a halt to Al Shabaab. Some members of the Somaliland Association in Malmö strongly condemn the acts of Al Shabaab. (O. Lönnaeus, “Sverigesomalier vill ha skärpta terrorlagar”/Somali Swedes Want Tougher Laws against Terror, 13 January 2010)
2. Premises used by the Somali Association in Malmö are the object of arson, after a fight between gangs of teenagers, one of them being a group of young Somalis. (J. Palmkvist, “Bränder misstänks vara hämndaktioner”/Arson Suspected to be Acts of Revenge, 11 August 2010)
3. A book on successful immigration is presented in Malmö, in which Somalis in Minneapolis stand out as one example. (C. Sandelind and M. Ådahl, “Invandring ger tillväxt”/Immigration Provides Growth, September 2010)
4. In a debate article Sara Johnsdotter refers to a verdict by the Supreme Court in which a Somali girl and her parents get payment of damages due to authorities having examined her on the suspicion that she had been circumcised. (S. Johnsdotter, “Kränk inte somaliers stolthet”/Do not Violate Somalis’ Pride, 26 November 2010)
5. The Somaliland Association is visited by the minister of integration, Erik Ullenhag, who is there to “listen and learn”. (A. Persson, C. Tornberg and J. Sturesson, “På schemat: integration”/On the Timetable: Integration, 9 March 2011)
6. Per Brinkemo from the Somaliland Association in Malmö writes about Somalis in Sweden and argues against the Swedish perception that “ethnicity is almost taboo”. (P. Brinkemo, “Etnicitet är inte fult”/Ethnicity is Not Improper, 9 March 2011)
7. Two young Somalis in Malmö are interviewed about their views on Al Shabaab, after the release of a report by the Swedish security police on the dangers of young Somalis being enticed to go to Somalia and join Al Shabaab. They both find it impossible to understand why young men raised in Sweden would want to do just that. (O. Lönnaeus and E. Magnusson, “Skandinavien måltavla för unga jihadistister”/Scandinavia Target for Young Jihadists, 18 May 2011)
8. Psychologist Yassin Ekdahl tells about his work with Somalis at the Red Cross centre for treatment in Malmö. (H. Welin and H. Røjder, “Fördomar stänger vägen till vård”/Prejudice Blocks the Road to Care, 8 June 2011)

9. In a debate article journalist Anders Hansson writes about a school for young Somali runners arranged by the athletic association MAI. (A. Hansson, "Sociala motiv bakom MAI:s löparskola"/Social Motives behind MAI's Runners School, September 2011)
10. Mohamed Hirsi, working with family reunification at the Red Cross in Malmö, tells about his experiences. (M. Werner, "Envist detektivarbete med rik belöning"/Persistent Detective Work with Rich Reward, 13 September 2011)
11. A report tells about the conditions in the Dadaab refugee camp on the border between Kenya and Somalia where about 450,000 Somalis are gathered. (N. Orrenius, "En vardag av svält och hunger"/Everyday with Starvation and Hunger, 4 October 2011)
12. A bomb blast in Mogadishu is reported through an interview with Abdiwahab Ugas Khalif, who used to live in Malmö for many years and who in 2011 became minister of trade and industry and deputy prime minister in Somalia. (E. Magnusson, "Detsamma som al-Quaida"/The Same as Al Qaeda, 7 October 2011)
13. Leicester, a city of the same size as Malmö, is investigated to see what a truly multicultural environment looks like. The reporter notes that "none of those we meet think it is a problem that for example Somalis live in a certain area". (K. Habul, "Här är vita snart i minoritet"/Here Whites are Soon in Minority, 7 April 2012)
14. Abdalla Jama, who helps kids with their homework at the Hodi association in Malmö, is interviewed. He says that "We are to be a support, not a parallel school" and that his work helps children whose parents have little education. (E. Leijnse, "Vi ska vara support, inte en parallell skola"/We are Supportive, Not a Parallel School, 10 April 2012)
15. The World Book Day is celebrated at the Rosengård library and a Somali writer, Nimao Ahmed Bulaleh, reads her poems, which are then spread by listeners through mobile phones. (O. Westerberg, "Det tryckta ordet i focus"/Printed Word in Focus, 24 April 2012)
16. Somalis in Malmö celebrate their national holiday, the day Somalia became independent in 1960, arranged by the association Hidde Iyo Dhaqan and its chairman Warsame Osman. People are happy and festively dressed and paper flags are distributed where one side is Somali and the other Swedish. (E. Fjellman Jaderup, "Somalier firade sin dag"/Somalis Celebrated Their Day, 2 July 2012)

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for minority and marginalised groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe.

Muslims in EU Cities was the project's first comparative research series which examined the position of Muslims in 11 cities in the European Union. Somalis in European cities follows from the findings emerging from the Muslims in EU Cities reports and offers the experiences and challenges faced by Somalis across seven cities in Europe. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents.