



# **Beyond a Roof and Walls: Gaps and Challenges in Providing Adequate Housing for Refugees in Malmö**

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## **Abstract**

This study attempts to analyse urban housing issues and their effects on providing adequate housing for refugees, using Malmö as a case study. The content analysis adopted here uses a combination of semi-structured interviews with relevant government officers, and reports published by government agencies and international institutions as sources of information.

The dominant role of the market in Sweden's housing sector has created housing inequalities and many issues for groups with lower socio-economic status. These issues consist of shortages in affordable dwellings, cramped housing conditions and spatial segregation within the city etc. This study illustrates that refugees in Malmö face additional issues such as lack of knowledge on the housing market, reluctance of landlords to accept refugees' establishment allowance as an income source, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of larger apartments for their comparatively larger households. They function as barriers to refugees' right to adequate housing as well as their right to the city, while limiting their opportunities to establish in the host country. The municipality also faces these issues when arranging housing for its 'assigned' refugees. Additionally, they are faced with an extended demand on the social services that are meant to support the native homeless groups. Refugees' housing issues are associated with some gaps involved in the process of accommodating refugees. The Settlement Act introduced in 2016 does not consider availability of housing when distributing refugees to municipalities. It takes more than two years to process asylum applications, compared to UN regulations of six months. The prolonged stay in accommodation centres delays their opportunities to become self-sufficient and integrated into the host society. Refugees are not provided with information relevant to the housing market in Sweden or the municipalities they are allocated to. Although municipalities are given the full responsibility of housing refugees assigned to them, the Settlement Act does not provide any guidelines as to how it should be done. In Malmö there is no evidence that any other government agency or a civil society organisation work in collaboration with the municipality to house refugees. It is clearly evident that the self-housing (EBO) mechanism functions against the objectives of the Settlement Act, consequently major cities such as Malmö continue to be refugee hotspots.

In this context, I would argue that refugee housing issues cannot be solved only through dispersal policies, but they should be backed by relevant housing policies that consider housing as a human right, rather than a market commodity. The municipalities should adopt a holistic approach in providing adequate housing for refugees, with adequate regulations on the housing market for the benefit of all.

Key words: Malmö, refugees, adequate housing, Settlement Act, housing market

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# 1. Introduction

This thesis attempts to analyse the effects of housing issues on the process of accommodating refugees in Malmö, and to identify the gaps and challenges in providing adequate housing for them.

The number of refugees in the world has been estimated as 25.9 million in 2019, whereas only 92,400 had been resettled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in that year. Fifty Seven percent of them have come from three countries; Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2019a). The highest number of refugees has been resettled in the United States through the UNHCR. In the Europe region, the United Kingdom received the highest number followed by Sweden and Germany (UNHCR, 2020).

Europe has long been a popular destination of asylum seekers, whereas the numbers reached the highest level in the year 2015. More than 911,000 of those fleeing the conflict zones in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq arrived in Europe (UNHCR, 2015). Although numbers have been decreasing since 2016, the challenges in accommodating refugees still prevail. The reception capacity of receiving countries is not adequate to fill the resettlement needs of the world's refugees. Less than five percent of resettlement needs have been met in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020).

Article 21 of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951, p.24), to which Sweden is a signatory, states “**As regards housing**, the contracting states, in so far as the matter is regulated by laws or regulations or is subject to the control of public authorities, shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory treatment as favourable as possible and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances” (UNHCR, 2010).

As right to housing is a basic human right, housing issues of those displaced received much attention at the UN General Assembly in 2015. The report by the special rapporteur on adequate housing highlighted ‘**migration and displacement**’ as one of the five cross-cutting areas that need special attention in providing right to adequate housing (UN General Assembly, 2015). Seven key components of adequate housing have been identified by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014). These components can be briefly listed as: security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural advocacy.

Despite all these conventions and protocols, accommodation and resettlement of refugees impose many challenges on host countries. The challenges faced by European countries in

accommodating refugees are predominated by provision of adequate housing for refugees, since most countries have severe housing shortages, especially in urban areas. In this context, providing a 'home' for refugees and their resettlement is a huge challenge and a process that takes a long time. Sweden is no exception.

Sweden accepts refugees through the UNHCR relocation system (quota refugees), as well as asylum seekers arriving at the border. The country had accepted 162,877 asylum seekers in 2015. The numbers accepted during 2016 - 2019 were between 16,000 - 28,000, while the forecast by the Sweden's Migration Board (Migrationsverket) is approximately 21,000 per year (Migrationsverket, 2019).

Although the reception of refugees is administered at the national level in Sweden, their resettlement is done at the local level. The recent refugee resettlement act introduced by Sweden (Law 2016: 38 on the reception of certain newly arrived immigrants for residence) requires municipalities to take the responsibility of refugees assigned to them and provide them with housing for at least two years (Sveriges Riksdag, 2016).

Yet, most of the 290 municipalities in Sweden already have deficiencies in housing. According to the Swedish Housing Agency (Boverket) many municipalities in the country have difficulties in providing housing for new arrivals. In the 2020 housing market survey, 212 municipalities have indicated housing deficits (Boverket, 2020a), whereas 147 municipalities have indicated that they have a housing deficit for assigned newcomers (Boverket, 2020b). As such, providing housing for refugees creates a severe competition among vulnerable groups that are in need for government assistance for housing. In these circumstances, housing refugees can create stress for municipalities as well as have an effect on the housing market of large cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, that accept the highest number of refugees.

**As Malmö is third in accepting the highest number of refugees, it is worthwhile investigating how it adheres to providing adequate housing for refugees within the context of prevailing housing issues, and identifying gaps and challenges faced by the municipality in this process.**

## 2. Research Objectives

Providing or facilitating access to housing for refugees is a key component of any resettlement programme. The fact that the asylum seekers are accepted to the country does not confirm them adequate housing in the host country. They face many obstacles in acquiring housing when moving out of reception facilities into the housing market. The transition of refugees from accommodation facilities to the localities in the host country is mostly decided by specific policies of the host country, but the real barriers faced by refugees in this process are not widely researched (Asylum Information Database - AIDA, 2019, p.6). Barriers to housing and inadequate housing lead to delays in refugees' integration onto the host society too.

Therefore, it is worthwhile analysing how this transition is taking place in a country such as Sweden, one of the European countries that hosts a high number of refugees. Within this frame of reference, refugees are considered as facing many barriers in acquiring the right to adequate housing, and as a result, directly or indirectly may be denied their right to have an adequate standard of living. While factors such as affordability, security of tenure, accessibility and habitability determine the **right to adequate housing**, the location and availability of services are associated with the **right to the city**. The absence of right to the city can be considered as adding to urban issues, as the majority of refugees are concentrated in urban areas.

As such, the present study was conducted within the broader discipline of 'Urban studies', and tries to connect urban housing issues and challenges in accommodating refugees. The focus of the study is at municipal level, whereas Malmö is selected as the case. Considering the housing issues prevailing in large cities, Malmö suits well for the study as it is the third largest city in Sweden. At the same time, it is third in receiving refugees, behind Stockholm and Gothenburg . Therefore, the aim of this research is to investigate the effects of housing issues on the adequate housing of refugees in Malmö, and to identify the gaps and challenges involved in this process. The following research questions were formulated accordingly:

### Research questions

- 1) What is the nature of housing issues in Malmö and how does it affect refugees?
- 2) How does Malmö adhere to providing adequate housing for refugees?
- 3) What are the gaps and challenges involved in providing adequate housing for refugees?

By answering these research questions, it is expected that this thesis will contribute to deepen the understanding of housing issues of refugees in Malmö.

### **Thesis outline**

After giving a brief introduction, and presenting the research questions, the third chapter of this thesis presents the research context, which is a review of relevant previous research. Research on strategies adopted by Sweden and other European countries in refugee integration, as well as housing issues in Sweden are discussed here. The fourth chapter presents concepts and the theoretical framework of the study. The main concepts discussed are: the right to housing and the right to the city. Chapter five describes the methodology adopted in finding answers to the above mentioned research questions. A brief discussion on case studies, content analysis and the use of semi-structured interviews are given here. The ethical aspects and the limitations of the study are also given in brief at the end of the chapter. Chapter six reports the results of the content analysis conducted. The information and statistics gathered from various government reports and interviews with relevant officers are presented systematically, following the steps in content analysis. The final chapter of the thesis is the concluding discussion that indicates the gaps in the refugee housing process and challenges faced by Malmö in providing adequate housing for refugees. Future research needs under this subject area are also presented towards the end.

Accordingly, this study attempts to provide an insight into housing issues involved with providing adequate housing for refugees in Malmö. An in depth analysis of the nature of the housing sector and population characteristics of Malmö is attempted, as they contribute to housing of refugees in Malmö. The conclusions arising from this study may be confined to Malmö. A broader comparative study involving other major cities in Sweden is required to make valid inferences into refugees' housing issues.

### **3. Research Context**

This section briefly discusses previous studies conducted on integration strategies adopted by some European countries to overcome the housing issues of refugees. In the latter part of the chapter, I will discuss research conducted on housing issues and refugee resettlement in Sweden.

The housing issues of refugees often have been associated and discussed at the policy level. A policy study conducted by the European Commission (2005a), that involved five EU countries, including Sweden, has indicated that immigrants and ethnic minority communities in the European Union (EU) are at greater risk of exclusion from the housing market. This study has indicated that housing policies and integration strategies of these countries often ignore the importance of access to decent housing. As a consequence, immigrants and ethnic minorities living in EU countries face many risks in the local housing markets. The necessity to adopt different policy approaches to ensure access to decent housing for these groups has been highlighted in this study.

A more recent report published by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) expresses concern over the administrative and legal restrictions faced by refugees in the process of transition from accommodation centres to the local housing market. It is feared that these restrictions may lead to emergence of a housing-based black market in which refugees could easily be exploited. It may ultimately impact European housing policies (AIDA, 2019, p.26). Further, the European Social Policy Network (ESPN, 2019) indicates that already existing housing shortages in European countries, and under investment in the housing sector may provide space for an anti-immigrant agenda, also affecting housing policies.

The above references discuss refugee accommodation and housing issues on a policy level. In the following I will discuss some of the housing issues related to refugees across Europe.

#### **3.1 Refugee integration strategies**

The Asylum and Immigration Act introduced by the United Kingdom in 1999 is considered to be the most significant legislation that affects housing and settlement options of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. The key feature introduced under this Act has been the dispersal of asylum seekers on a 'no-choice' basis to 12 pre-decided areas in the UK. However, these dispersal areas have been characterised as having low demand for houses, compared to London and the southeast, often lacking necessary infrastructure and services, while the houses available are those not easily rented due to their poor quality. This has

produced many concerns which include, treating refugees as a separate group of less importance compared to natives, and possible racist harassment (Phillips, 2006). Netto (2011) considers the 'no-choice' dispersal policy as a measure to ease the pressure on housing and related services in London and the south-east. Further, this policy is viewed as a mechanism to exclude refugees from enjoying the benefits of public goods and services available to natives. As I have indicated earlier, the location of housing, and availability of services are considered as components of adequate housing, as well as determining the access to the city. Thus, their absence interferes with refugees' right to adequate housing and the right to the city. Indirectly this mechanism attempts to discourage more refugees entering the country.

Despite many refugee housing initiatives adopted by the UK, there are certain obstacles that prevent their effective implementation. They involve: lack of information on refugee housing needs, lack of communication between government agencies, conflicting local government priorities and confused responsibilities, limited resources and extensive demands on services available. In this context, it is emphasized that implementation of an effective housing strategy for refugees and asylum seekers would be successful through a holistic, community-centred and inter-agency approach, supported by adequate resources and clear political commitment (Phillips, 2006).

Refugees' transition from state accommodation to the housing market often experiences differences at regional and local levels in Germany. Therefore, understanding this process needs research on the local variations in strategies and administrative procedures (El-Kayed and Hamann, 2018). Adam et al. (2019), conducting a study in Cologne, indicates that transition into private housing from accommodation centres takes a long time due to many reasons. The specific issues highlighted here are; the large number of refugees, the already tight housing market situation, and the competition for affordable housing with other vulnerable groups. Furthermore, landlords' reservations about refugees' payments for rent through social welfare is considered as a significant barrier. Reflecting the situation in the UK, in Germany also, housing decisions made by the municipalities, and refugees' lack of choice for a place of living has caused dissatisfaction among refugees. Despite many initiatives taken by municipalities, refugees have found social networks to be most effective in gaining access to their own housing. However, this may involve unreliable rental arrangements, exposing the refugees to the risk of eviction and homelessness. In this context, the authors highlight the need to promote construction of affordable housing at local level, and refugee-sensitive policies at the national level to facilitate integration.

Even if social housing is considered as a solution to reduce housing issues of refugees, it does not ensure newcomers' access to affordable housing in Vienna, Austria. This system consists of a list of criteria to evaluate the need for social housing that refugees often find difficult to meet. Therefore, the social workers who are normally considered by refugees as facilitators or door openers can also function as controllers or gatekeepers (Aigner, 2019). In my opinion this is a typical administrative barrier in access to housing by refugees.

One of the major drawbacks in Italy's refugee integration process is the difficulty experienced in implementing national strategies at the local level. This reflects the situation experienced by Germany I discussed earlier. Italy's national strategies are implemented differently by mayors in different municipalities. As such, there is a need to study the refugee housing issues at the local level, in order to achieve the objectives of the national framework (Bolzonio et al., 2015).

Although Canada does not belong to the Europe region, it is worthwhile mentioning research conducted there, as it is considered as one of the most preferred destinations of asylum seekers. Yet, refugees are more likely to experience lack of access to adequate housing than economic migrants in Vancouver. Francis and Hiebert (2014) point out language barriers, lack of reference, and financial constraints as key challenges in securing adequate housing. Furthermore, access to adequate housing correlates with employment, education and other social needs. Poverty and substandard housing which are characteristic for refugees were found to be associated with the ability of landlords to take advantage of tenants, and creating negative stereotypes in the neighbourhoods. In this context, the authors emphasize the need for greater coordination between housing and settlement policies, and government interventions in facilitating access to information.

There are several European countries that use dispersal policies in their refugee integration process. The objective of these policies is to fasten the integration process as well as to reduce the burden on major cities usually preferred by refugees to settle. However, the effectiveness of these policies is worthwhile analysing. Haberfeld et al. (2019) have studied the relocation patterns of refugees that had been settled in Sweden under the 'Whole Sweden' policy during 1990 - 1993. Similar to the 2016 Settlement Act, the 'Whole Sweden' policy gave refugees no or little opportunity to select their own destination within the country, unless they could find housing by themselves. The researchers had observed internal migration of refugees after their initial placement by the government. Their choices of destinations were found to be related to the education level, where those with high skills moved to cities with larger labour markets. At the same time it has been observed that refugees prefer to live close to their 'own people' and move into such neighbourhoods. This move also facilitates their employment opportunities through informal social networks. But, those who moved have ended up in localities with high representation of inhabitants from their own background. As such, the achievement of the initial objective of this policy, i.e. reducing the burden of certain groups of refugees within the country, cannot be considered successful. I further assume that policies of this nature may contribute to increased segregation.

The 2015 refugee crisis had given rise to many policy changes in Scandinavian countries. The unanticipated influx of refugees to the European region made a huge impact on Sweden, which was one of the main receiving countries. As the receiving capacity of the country

became increasingly unmanageable, Sweden introduced strict regulations on refugee immigration in terms of border controls, and amendments to the protection status which shifted from permanent residence permits to temporary permits. Furthermore, eligibility to permanent residency was tied to being employed and self-sufficient. This has made refugees more dependent on the labour market, while possibly being exploited by employers. Nonetheless, these changes also involved distributing funds for municipalities to develop their capacities to accommodate refugees assigned to them (Hagelund, 2020).

I observe somewhat similar features in the dispersal policies adopted by other countries and the Settlement Act introduced by Sweden in 2016. Similar to the UK 'no choice' dispersal policy, the Swedish Settlement Act also does not provide any choice for refugees. Willingly or unwillingly they are expected to make 'home' in the municipality they are allocated to. At the same time, the strategies adopted in providing houses for refugees vary across the municipalities in the country (Righard and Öberg, 2019), as municipalities differ in the quality of available houses, employment and educational opportunities etc. There is no guarantee that the houses provided by municipalities to their assigned refugees would meet the requirements of adequate housing as stipulated by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014). As such, I argue that the humanitarian aspect of these dispersal policies is rather questionable.

The housing situation for refugees may become worse when they move into the housing market by themselves. Their financial constraints, being unfamiliar with the Swedish housing market, and discriminatory attitudes towards them may function as practical barriers in their access to housing. As stated earlier, the competition between refugees and other vulnerable groups within the housing sector gives more power to landlords to select tenants and decide on the terms of tenure and rents. Refugees are more prone to being exploited in the black market, which may put them in insecure tenure conditions while being compelled to accept substandard houses at higher prices. All these factors increase the risk of refugees becoming homeless. At the same time, when they pay a higher price at least to have a roof over their head, they may have to compromise their other needs such as clothes and food to a certain extent. I consider this as affecting their right to an adequate standard of living too.

### **3.2 Sweden: Issues in the housing sector**

Sweden has a universal housing policy which recognises equal rights of all tenures. Yet, prices and quality of housing vary in an open housing market that has less government regulations. Bengtsson (2001) recognises the lack of adequate housing for non-privileged groups as a major issue in cities. Therefore, he emphasises that the state needs to intervene with some form of 'correctives' in the housing market. However, this may require those who cannot compete in the housing market, to meet some criteria to justify their need for state support for housing. I consider this as resembling the case in Vienna, I discussed earlier. If the number of people in this group keeps on increasing, the demand for the protective

legislation will also increase. This may ultimately lead to the birth of a new form of 'selective' housing policy.

As Bengtsson, Grander (2018, p.127) also argues for the necessity of state correctives in the housing regime. The gradual conversion of Sweden's universal housing policy is implied as becoming a 'selective' model, whereas the beneficiaries are not those vulnerable groups that need state protection in the housing market, but the financially stable middle class.

Baeten and Listerborn (2015) indicate that housing policies in Sweden, which are supposed to be a main feature in the welfare system are now forming the foundation for 'anti-welfare' policies. The earlier notion of affordable housing no longer provides a solution for homelessness faced by the poor. Rather, affordable housing has become a new social problem as it attracts other unforeseeable groups, not those who are in real need. These policies then push vulnerable groups to the outskirts of the city, as they become unable to compete on the housing market. I consider this as contributing to denying citizens' equal right to housing as well as the right to the city.

Baeten et al. (2017), discussing previous research on housing policies, indicate that the Swedish housing sector, which has experienced many changes during the past decades, has now been transformed into a system that creates social divisions. It has created different social groups based on income level, access to utilities etc. This has given rise to gentrification, where certain neighbourhoods in the city are characterised by high concentrations of affluent residents. The state is no longer active in the housing sector, in which the market has become the dominant actor that considers housing as a market commodity rather than a human right. I would like to highlight this as a barrier for vulnerable groups such as refugees to enter into the housing market in Sweden.

Housing shortage is considered as a major issue in Sweden's housing sector. However, Grander (2018, p.4) indicates that the real issue is the different housing options available for different social groups. The availability of various choices has created inequalities in the Swedish housing sector today. As the author explains, these inequalities arise due to two factors: i) access to housing, where affordability depends on the income level, and ii) quality of housing - the quality of the dwelling itself and the quality of the neighbourhood (p.38). These factors can be considered as determining the right to adequate housing, where affordability, accessibility, location and habitability are key features of adequate housing.

I would like to associate the quality of the house with habitability, i.e. whether it provides adequate space, security, physical and mental well-being etc. The quality of the neighbourhood can be considered in relation to whether the dwellings are located in a deprived area of the city, whether they are in a mixed housing area or an immigrant-densed

area etc. These factors are more important for refugees as they can either restrict or facilitate refugees' potential to establish in a new country and their integration into the host society.

I consider Grander's (2018, p.121) argument that "housing inequality needs to be seen as a norm that limits the life possibilities of the disadvantaged" as highly applicable to newcomers or refugees. Further, "housing inequality creates, reinforces, and reproduces existential inequality, making individuals in insecure housing feel like second class citizens" (p.145). In my opinion this can be applied to explain the conditions faced by refugees in Sweden.

### **3.3 Housing Refugees in Sweden**

Although many researchers indicate refugees' low income as a barrier to adequate housing, Andersen et al. (2013) highlight housing policy initiatives as a significant factor that determines immigrants' housing options. Thus, difficulties faced by immigrants accessing housing can be lessened or increased by housing policies of the host countries. Furthermore, the structure of the housing market, which is shaped by housing policies can influence spatial segregation, creating clearly visible separate areas within cities. This segregation increases the portion of immigrants in public housing in Sweden, while pushing them to less-attractive areas with low-quality housing. With increasing numbers of immigrants, these areas experience 'white flight', where natives tend to move out to other areas. At the same time 'white avoidance' may also occur where immigrants tend to find housing in so-called 'immigrant neighborhoods', avoiding living close to natives. As a result, these areas may become stigmatised.

Unsatisfactory and undignified housing conditions cause stress and humiliation to refugees, while delaying their social integration and economic independence. The unsatisfactory housing situation among refugees in Sweden can be related to the shortage of affordable housing and growing housing inequality in the country. The Settlement Act demands municipalities to be responsible for providing housing for the refugees assigned to them. But, there is a variation in standards of housing provided by municipalities, as the Act does not provide any guidance as to what type of housing to be provided, for how long etc. Therefore, it is a timely need to review the intentions of the Settlement Act in relation to how it is practised and regulated at the local level (Righard and Öberg, 2019).

Myrberg (2017), discussing municipal level responses to national refugee settlement policies in Sweden, questions the government's procedures in distributing refugees and municipalities' ability of housing their assigned refugees. Different municipalities have different challenges in housing and settlement of newcomers, where housing of newcomers impose a huge challenge to cities such as Malmö that receive comparatively higher numbers of refugees. The issue of housing refugees with the municipalities become more visible with the 'Lagen om eget boende' (EBO), where refugees prefer to find housing by themselves in a municipality of their choice. While highlighting the political disagreements between the

national and the municipal levels, the question raised by the author is whether the Swedish government can come up with a model that provides a more sustainable distribution of newcomers across all municipalities.

Most of the studies on refugees have discussed the effects of asylum policies and integration efforts. Housing issues have been highlighted in relation to resettlement of refugees. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of in-depth local level research in Sweden, combining the issues in the housing sector and refugee integration. It is expected that this study would contribute to a certain extent in fulfilling this need.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

This thesis is written within the broader discipline of urban studies, and tries to investigate urban housing issues and its effects on accommodating refugees in urban areas. As stated in the introductory chapter, the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees has given special provision to the housing of refugees. Furthermore, the UNHCR indicates that a majority of the world's refugees live in urban areas. In 2018 the proportion of refugees based in urban areas has been estimated as 61 percent (UNHCR, 2019b, p.57). As a result, most of the refugees' housing issues relate to urban areas. Therefore, the 'right to housing' and the 'right to the city' provide the theoretical basis for this thesis.

### 4.1 Right to Housing

It is often difficult to provide a specific definition for 'right to housing' as it is understood and recognised at various levels across countries. The definition may depend on governments' housing policies and the ideology of political parties too (Bengtsson, 2001).

Kucs et al. (2005) also indicate that the scope of the right to housing is difficult to describe as its scope, and level of recognition by states vary according to countries. Some countries may recognise it as an individual right for citizens while others may consider it as a responsibility of the state. Despite these differences, countries are increasingly recognising that the right to housing should include some essential components and that states should fulfill some minimum standards when providing this right.

The right to housing is recognised as a basic human right, and this right implies more than having a roof over one's head. It should be interpreted in a broader sense because the right to housing is integrated and linked with other fundamental human rights. In this context, it should be read as right to 'adequate housing'. As mentioned earlier, the components of adequate housing consists of security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural advocacy.

Although the 'right to housing' is contained in the national constitution in a number of European countries, including Sweden, the legal mechanisms available to enable this right are rather few. To define housing as a legal right needs institutional arrangements within the housing sector, especially in the tenure system (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2014).

Despite the interventions such as favourable housing policies and increased social and public housing expenditure, cities continue to face a huge challenge of homelessness and housing inequalities. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (HABITAT III) suggested that sustainable urban development strategies need to adopt a

rights-based approach to housing (HABITAT III Secretariat, 2016, p.45).

I consider that recognising the right to adequate housing of refugees would provide them a secure place to live in a location that has access to future opportunities such as education and employment. Furthermore, it is supposed to provide them with habitable housing conditions that ensure their physical and mental well-being. All these aspects are expected to provide refugees opportunities for life. At the same time, fulfilling the refugees' need for 'adequate housing' would require recognising the 'cultural advocacy', which enables them to express their own identity, while establishing in a new land and integrating into host society.

#### **4.2 Right to the City**

It is clear from what is discussed above, that 'adequate housing' is not a single need, but a bundle of needs for an adequate standard of living. Absence of certain factors in this bundle, i.e. availability of services, affordability, location, and accessibility, can be seen as denying one's right to the city.

As defined by the World Charter for the Right to the City, it is the "equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, and social justice." (Habitat International Coalition, 2005, p.2). It further elaborates that everyone has the right to the city, despite the variations in age, gender, economic status, ethnicity and migratory conditions etc.

The concept of 'the right to the city' was first introduced by Henri Lefebvre as early as 1967. According to him, one's desire for right to the city can be considered as a 'demand' as well as a 'cry' for the city (Lefebvre, 1967, p. 158). More and more groups, often those with expectations for a better life, demand to live in cities in order to fulfill their aspirations such as better employment opportunities. On the other hand, there may be certain groups, though they already live in urban areas, face restrictions in fully enjoying the benefits provided by the city. They can be considered as being superficially integrated with the city, thus 'cry' for fully realisation of their right to the city (Marcuse, 2009).

What is explained above assumes that the right to city can be considered as the right to urban life. It is a way of living and all those groups with various socio-economic backgrounds are supposed to have the same right to the city (Lefebvre, 1967, p.158). It can be considered as all sorts of rights associated with city life, where everyone's desire for a better life can be fulfilled. Thus, it involves not only legal rights of individuals, but also ethical acceptance of equal rights of the other. It would allow realising one's full potential, while recognising differences among each other (Marcuse, 2012).

Acquiring the right to the city, while recognising the right to be different, draws attention to a new vision for citizenship, that has been referred to as "care-tizenship". The term "care-tizenship" has first been introduced by Casas-Cortes (2019), who suggests that caring

relationships among community members can help meet each other's basic needs. It is expected that these care-tizenship practices would have the potential to transform the city in a way to fulfill citizens' needs.

This concept had been used by Tsavdaroglou et al. (2019) in their study analysing the housing issues of refugees in Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene in Greece. They highlight that refugees' claim for right to the city may become successful through the collective acts of care-tizenship and grassroot-level initiatives such as self-organised refugee housing projects. The importance of working towards a common goal amidst differences is emphasised in this respect, which may be explained by Lefebvre's concept of collective demand for the right to the city. In fact, the caring practices provide the base for the sustainability of the housing projects, as well as social and political strength for refugees' demand for right to the city. Furthermore, the self-organised housing projects support refugees in regaining their dignity, and make them more visible complemented by the right to be different. It also calls for local citizens to acknowledge refugees' distinct characteristics.

Refugees are often marginalized in cities, face a number of issues in urban environments such as lack of access to adequate housing, have limited access to services, including access to information. If these groups are pushed to the outskirts, and denied their right to the city, it implies that not only their rights to adequate standard of living, but their future is also being threatened. As such, realising refugees' right to the city is of high significance, as they try to start their lives from scratch, in a new country, a new city.

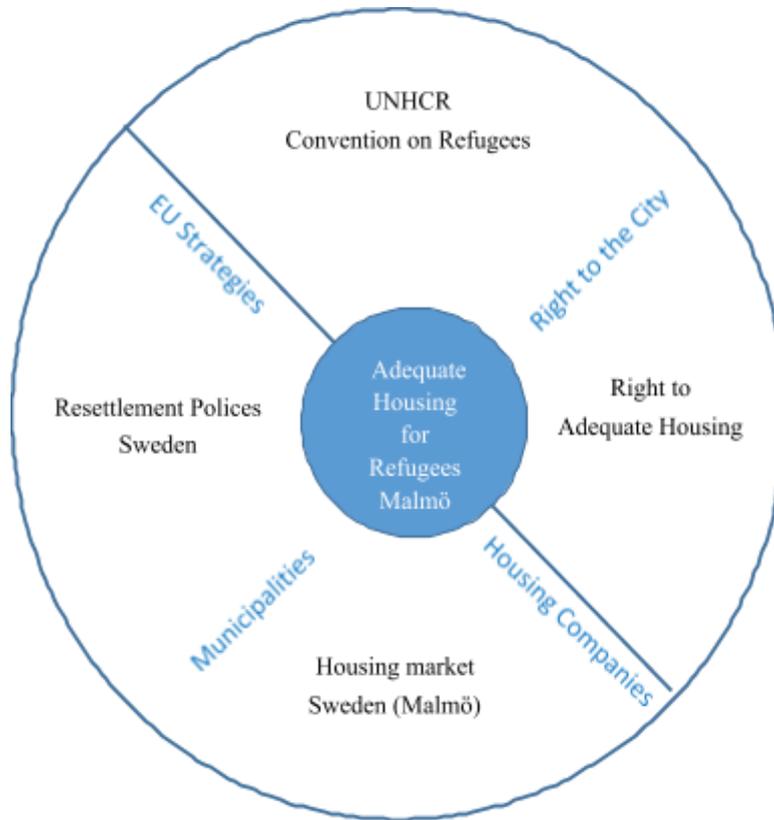
## 5. Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods adopted in analysing the research questions. Limitations and challenges involved in the study, and ethical considerations will be discussed towards the end of the chapter.

As stated under research objectives, this thesis is written within the broader discipline of urban studies and tries to connect urban housing issues and challenges in accommodating refugees in urban areas. Research relevant to housing involves several disciplines such as sociology and welfare policies, income status and economic policies, urban development policies etc. (Aalbers, 2018). All these aspects have an impact on housing. I would like to argue that refugee and migration policies of the receiving country can also have an impact on the housing sector of that country. Therefore, research on adequate housing for refugees could also be based on several aspects such as the refugee settlement policy of the receiving country, its housing market, as well as the strategies adopted by municipalities that host refugees.

As such, I have considered four main factors that contribute to adequate housing of refugees in Malmö. (i) Sweden, as a country, abides by the UNHCR Convention on refugees and has to follow the UN protocols in accommodating refugees. (ii) Sweden has its own refugee resettlement policies, in this case I have considered the Settlement Act, which is currently applicable. (iii) The housing market, particularly the nature of the housing market in Malmö, can be considered as a limiting factor in housing refugees. (iv) Refugees' right to adequate housing should be acknowledged and the components of 'adequate housing' are expected to have due attention when housing refugees.

As indicated in Figure 5.1, these components relate to the core of the research along EU strategies in resettlement of refugees, strategies adopted by municipalities, the role of housing companies, and recognition of refugees' right to the city. As I will explain later, Sweden has to follow the regulations of the Common European Asylum System and the Common Basic Principles for immigrants, adopted by the European Union. Yet, the municipalities have the ultimate responsibility on implementing these principles as well as Sweden's Settlement Act, whereas the strategies adopted by each municipality may vary. However, policies or the motives of public and private housing companies play a major role in either facilitating or hindering municipalities' objectives of housing refugees. Then finally, housing refugees is expected to ensure their right to the city, as it is associated with opportunities for the future.



**Figure 5.1: Factors contributing to adequate housing of refugees in Malmö**

### 5.1 Methodological Reflections

The research questions involved in this thesis are:

1. What is the nature of housing issues in Malmö and how does it affect refugees?
2. How does Malmö adhere to providing adequate housing for refugees?
3. What are the gaps and challenges in providing adequate housing for refugees?

This study is mainly based on interviews and the analysis of information published in government reports, thus can be considered a qualitative analysis. It allowed me to use more words to present my research results, than a quantitative analysis, which is mainly based on analysing numerical data (Bryman, 2008, p.369). Yet I also used many statistics to present a complete picture. Further, interviews with relevant government officers helped me to extract more information for my analysis. The first research question is analysed mainly using secondary data; statistics and information published by government agencies and the international institutions working on refugee resettlement issues. The second research question is analysed mainly through primary information gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected governmental officers. A combination of both primary and secondary information is used in the analysis of the third research question, and will be mostly discussed in the concluding chapter.

Conducting a case study is the best option for a research of this nature, which requires in-depth and detailed analysis. The case was selected considering the trends of refugee reception and establishment in Sweden. The number of persons that received residence permits with refugee status in Sweden has varied over the years, whereas the municipalities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö have the highest reception. Although the first two have more refugees, Malmö is the municipality with the largest reception in relation to the size of the population. It has received 2,443 refugees in 2017, and 1,488 in 2018. The number received in 2019 was 989, which is almost 3 persons per 1000 inhabitants. In addition, there have been 1,436 asylum seekers living in their own accommodation in Malmö by the end of 2019 (Malmö Stad, 2020a).

It is usual for refugees to try their first housing in a city close to the area they enter the country. In this case Malmö being located in the border of Sweden, more refugees are waiting there until their asylum applications are processed. Furthermore, even if they wait somewhere else during the asylum period, they move to a major city a few years after receiving their residence permit. This move is associated with their perspectives on opportunities for employment. Malmö is the largest city in Skåne county as well as the third largest city in Sweden. It is considered as the core in the Greater Malmö metropolitan area, which consists of 12 municipalities including Lund, Trelleborg, Eslöv and Burlöv. The metropolitan areas are considered as areas with a rich labour market. This has been a pull factor for refugees being attracted to Malmö for a long period of time. **In this context, Malmö was selected as the best option for the case study analysis.**

## **5.2 Semi-structured Interviews**

Interviewing is probably the most widely used method in qualitative research. The two main types are: unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2008, p.436). I have selected semi-structured interviews as I initiated my investigation with a fairly clear focus, so I can address more specific questions. The main advantage was that it gave both focus and freedom for the informant to speak and I could ask follow-up questions.

The table below shows the details of the interviews conducted. The informants were selected and contacted based on their professional role, as indicated on respective websites, or on the recommendation of an authoritative person in that particular establishment.

**Table 5.1: Interviews conducted for the study**

Institute/Organization	Informant/Interviewee	Date of interview	Code for the thesis
Malmö Stad <i>Responsible for providing housing for refugees allocated to Malmö municipality</i>	Advisory officer Labour Market and Social Services Department	2020.02.20	S
Migrationsverket <i>The authority responsible for accommodating (issuing residence permits) refugees</i>	Migration expert  Refugee housing expert	2020.03.05	M1  M2
MKB Fastighets AB <i>Malmö's largest public utility housing company.</i>	Social housing development officer	2020.03.19 Cancelled due to 'Corona outbreak'	
Länsstyrelsen Skåne <i>The authority responsible for allocating refugees to various municipalities in Skåne</i>	Integration development officer	2020.03.20	(L)

The interviews were initiated with few pre-prepared questions, formulated based on my background knowledge of the subject and information available on their respective websites. The questions were asked on the aspects that I am not clear about, or the aspects that I need more information etc. Obviously, the questions involved in each interview were different from others, but had some uniform direction towards the research theme. Informant's consent was requested to record the interview before starting the interview.

Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews with Malmö Stad and the Migrationverket were conducted in respective office premises in a calm and non-disturbing environment. Unfortunately, the issues of the 'Corona outbreak' affected the other interviews. As a result, the interview with the MKB Fastighets AB was cancelled by the contact person, and I could not get at least an online interview. I tried to cover the information needed from MKB by using their latest annual reports of 2019 and 2018. However, I could not get some specific information that I planned to retrieve through the interview. I managed to have an online interview with the Länsstyrelsen's contact person. But my opinion is that it was not as effective as a face to face interview.

I had my interview guides with five to six questions in each. The questions were organised in a specific order giving a reasonable flow with the intention of obtaining information that I need to answer my three research questions. But there were instances that I changed the order of questions, based on the informants' responses. There were occasions I asked them additional questions and requested the informants to clarify certain responses that I could not understand.

Although the interviews were recorded I took down notes of important points interviewees highlighted during the interviews. This made the transcription process more convenient. Recording made it possible to capture interviewees' responses in their own words, which I consider as important in analysing the information. At the same time, it enabled me to listen to certain clauses several times, in order to grab the information given there. As transcribing is a time-consuming task, I listened to recordings very closely and transcribed only those portions that I thought as relevant or useful. Interviews were transcribed within two days after taking place, so as not to lose the fresh memory.

I would like to point out an advantage and a disadvantage of the interviews I had with these officers. First, I would like to record in place that all the interviewees were very friendly and supportive. The advantage was, that being a non-Swedish person, I could even ask simple questions, one might think as 'dumb' if asked by a Swedish national. Additionally, the officers explained even the smallest things with great concern. Therefore, I could obtain a vast amount of information that is not available on websites, as well as some clarifications to facts that were not clearly stated on these websites (English version). At the same time, the disadvantage of conducting interviews in English created some difficulties for officers to find the correct English version for some technical terms. Yet, I requested them to use the Swedish word, so that I would try to use 'Google translate' to get the suitable term, when listening to the recordings.

I would have liked to interview a sample of refugees to have their opinions on the housing facilities offered to them by the Migrationsverket and Malmö Stad. But this could not be arranged within the limited time available for this study. No survey has been conducted by a government authority to obtain the views of the refugees on facilities offered to them.

### **5.3 Content Analysis**

Klaus Krippendorff (2004, p.18) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. As a research technique, it provides new insights and increases the researcher's understanding of a particular phenomena". As this study involves analysis of large amounts of information, the ability to make valid conclusions from those texts is an important factor for the success of the study. As Krippendorff (p.19) further explains, the phrase "or other meaningful matter" implies that content analysis can use images, maps, sounds, signs,

symbols, and even numerical records as texts giving information on that particular subject. Similarly, information gathered through interviews and focus group meetings can also be considered as texts in content analysis (p.27). As such, transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews along with the texts from Swedish government reports and other international research reports were used as data sources for content analysis in this study.

Since I started the process with specific research questions, the analysis adopted here can be considered as a problem-driven content analysis. This made it more convenient for me to select the texts for my sample. There are two advantages in starting with research questions; it makes the process more efficient, and it enables the researcher to connect theories to what she reads or hears. As Krippendorff (2004, p.31) states, “content analysts who start with a research question read texts for a purpose, not for what an author may lead them to think”.

The first step of content analysis is to decide on the level of analysis, which could be the words, phrases, sentences or themes. I decided to use ‘themes’ as my level of analysis. This provided me the basis to select my sample texts from a vast amount of information available in the web. The sample texts were selected based on their relevance to the research questions (Krippendorff, 2004, p.347). It was not an easy task deciding on the relevance of texts to be selected for analysis. I selected texts based on headlines or by superficial reading for clues to the relevance of the text to my research questions. At the same time, the reputation of authors as well as the authoritativeness of the publisher such as the UNHCR were adopted as the criteria for selection. Nonetheless, the biggest challenge involved in extracting information from government reports was that most of the important reports are published only in Swedish. I used the ‘Google translate’ option to translate these reports to English, though I fear that some words I use to present information from those reports may not mean the exact same in Swedish.

Initially the contents were organized under themes, whereas the ‘themes’ were identified along with the factors I presented in figure 5.1. Nonetheless, some other themes or sub-themes were added while reading the texts and transcriptions. The advantage was that these themes provided me the guideline for writing the analysis part of this thesis.

It is important in content analysis to define what is to be included and under what theme, in order to ensure that all relevant texts are included, and significant information is not left out. Therefore, I decided on what words or phrases should be included under each theme. For example, words and phrases such as ‘housing shortage’, ‘prices of houses’, ‘housing contracts’ and ‘landlords’ were categorised and coded under the theme “Housing market”. This process was helpful in obtaining an overview of the material selected as well as making them more manageable.

Krippendorff (2004, p.101) states that the length of context units should be decided by its meaningfulness and reliability. However, I found that it was rather difficult to decide on the

limits of contexts to be included under each unit or sub category, where I ended up having rather long texts under certain categories. In addition to texts, statistics from Statisticsmyndigheten SCB, Migrationsverket and Boverket were used to analyse trends such as refugee inflows, housing status etc. and used to support the interpretations.

The basic advantage of content analysis as a research method is that it is highly flexible; a researcher can conduct it at any time, anywhere, if materials are available. In addition to printed texts, it can also use some other research methods such as interviews and observations, which makes it more powerful in making inferences. There is no need for a special statistical package, yet there is a qualitative data analysis software named 'NVivo'. However, as I did not have access to that software, the content analysis was performed manually, which was extremely time consuming.

#### **5.4 Ethical Aspects**

The foundation for the ethical aspects of this research is based on the guidelines given by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018). I adhered to the three basic principles stipulated under 'the researcher's relation to the task': i) reliability- ensuring the sources of data are reliable, ii) honesty - when arranging interviews, analysing secondary data and reporting, and iii) respect- towards the informants and also the refugees when discussing about them

Before each interview, a declaration form signed by me was given to the interviewee. It stated the purpose of the interview and a declaration that the information received through the interview would be purely for academic purposes, and would not be used in any other purpose.

The discussions were only on each informant's organization's functions and contribution in accommodating refugees and providing them housing in Malmö. In addition, general issues related to the housing market in Malmö were discussed. The interviews never involved anyone's personal opinions on refugees or political issues. I have given due recognition to other researchers whose work I have cited in this thesis, and have never reported their writings or findings as mine.

#### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

This study was conducted as a single case study, analysing issues relevant to Malmö. Yet, according to Boverket (2020b), 147 out of 290 municipalities in Sweden face issues with regard to housing newcomers. These municipalities vary in size, population characteristics and housing markets. Accordingly, each municipality adopts its own strategies to provide housing for newcomers. If we are to obtain a complete picture of refugees' housing issues, a

broader comparative analysis is needed. This could not be achieved through this study due to limited time assigned to the study.

Besides, this study could analyse only one side of the story. It did not seek refugees' views on their housing issues. They could have presented their opinions on whether they are satisfied with the conditions of housing provided by the municipality, what they think of EBOs and maybe could have made some suggestions for improvements. This component was not involved in the present study, as it needs more time, financial resources and may be more manpower too.

Further, this study tried to analyse the effects of Sweden's Settlement Act:2016 on housing issues of refugees. I would have liked to conduct a comparative analysis with refugee resettlement strategies adopted by other European countries. This was also not possible due time and financial constraints.

In my opinion, there is a need for a nation-wide survey to obtain refugees' views on the quality of housing offered to them by the Migrationsverket during the asylum period as well as housing provided to them by municipalities during their probationary period. This period varies according to municipalities based on each municipality's housing issues and policies. A broader study of this nature would help in identifying the issues involved in providing adequate housing for refugees, hence would contribute to improve the conditions.

## **6. Analysis**

This chapter presents the descriptive analysis of information and data gathered in this study. Analysis is done under two main themes which are parallel to my first two research questions: A) Context of housing, and B) Accommodating refugees. Under section A, a brief discussion on the context of housing in Sweden is given as an introduction. This is followed by a detailed analysis of housing context in Malmö and its effects on refugees. Section B presents the process of accommodating refugees in Sweden, and the strategies adopted by Malmö Stad in housing the refugees assigned to it. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the first research question (section A), in this chapter is analysed using secondary data, while the second research question (section B) is analysed mainly using information gathered through interviews with relevant officers, and is backed by data published by the Government. The third research question on challenges and gaps in providing adequate housing for refugees will be analysed under both sections as and when appropriate, but mainly in the concluding chapter.

### **A) Context of Housing**

UN HABITAT: the United Nations Human Settlement Programme considers urbanisation as one of the most significant global trends of the twenty first century. Housing is one of the many challenges enforced by urbanisation, whilst the right to housing is considered as a basic human right. Furthermore, it is associated with many other human rights such as; the right to security, right to physical and mental wellbeing, and the right to an adequate standard of living. In this context, housing is an essential component in refugee resettlement.

Any country, especially a refugee receiving country such as Sweden has to pay adequate attention to the rights associated with housing. The right to housing is confirmed by the Constitution of Sweden in conformity with the European Social Charter, which emphasises the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, including migrants. The European Social Charter, a treaty that ensures the protection of significant human rights, provides special attention to housing rights, requires the EU countries to protect these rights without any form of discrimination. As a party to this charter, Sweden is bound to ensure the right to housing as stipulated in its Article 31- the right to housing. This is to be achieved through; promoting access to housing of an adequate standard, preventing homelessness and making the houses affordable to those lacking adequate resources (Council of Europe, 2020).

However, ‘social housing’, i.e. providing housing at subsidised rental rates for socially or economically disadvantaged households, is not recognised in Sweden’s housing policy. Instead, the universal housing policy of Sweden uses the term ‘allmännyttan’, which signifies that all housing options are open to everyone regardless of economic, social or any other

means. In my opinion, this has created many issues such as increased competition in the market, in which those with less economic means cannot make a voice. Accordingly, I consider that the universal policy adopted by Sweden is unable to protect the housing rights of all of its citizens without discrimination.

### **6.1 Housing context in Sweden**

Sweden's housing sector has undergone many policy reforms from being state-regulated to a market-oriented one with minimum state intervention. The housing policies of the pre-1970s, especially the initiatives for the Million Homes Programme (MHP) have been focussed on overcoming the housing shortages at that time. However, as the houses developed under the MHP were apparently homogenous in certain neighbourhoods, they were considered to have showcased socio-economic segregation. Thus, a new housing policy has been introduced with the objective of creating socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods. But, the social-mix policy created some unintended results. As it was not regulated at national level such as with the MHP, municipalities implemented it in their own ways. With the housing construction dropping during the recession period of early 1990s it became a difficult task to implement the mixed policy, whereas even the municipality-owned public housing companies also had to focus on profits in order to survive. Gradually, the housing sector in Sweden has fallen into the hands of profit-based, market-oriented housing companies (Andersson et al., 2010).

As pointed out by (Hedin et al., 2012), this conversion of the housing sector has given rise to many consequences. Subsidies for housing construction as well as housing allowances for low-income families have been reduced or withdrawn, resulting in reduced construction and increased housing vacancies in certain areas. Overcrowding has increased among low-income and other vulnerable groups, further affecting their standards of living. Public housing companies have become more profit oriented while municipalities increasingly fail to fulfill social commitments with regard to housing. As I will elaborate later in this chapter, low-income groups have been compelled to spend a greater portion of their disposable income on housing, than their better-off counterparts. With these changes, gentrification came into existence, especially in major cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. In case of Malmö, it displays a clear pattern of gentrification among the west and east parts that are characterised by high-income households and low-income apartments respectively. This will be further analysed later in this chapter. Meanwhile, the gentrification process is further maintained through increasing investments in gentrifying areas and decreasing investments in those areas with low-income households. All these factors have contributed to a solid, long-lasting status of housing inequalities in Sweden.

I consider that refugees are hit harder by the above consequences than native Swedes. Statistics Sweden (Statistikmyndigheten, 2018) has indicated that those with foreign backgrounds are more likely to live in overcrowded housing conditions than those with Swedish backgrounds. Accordingly, residential overcrowding, i.e. living in an area less than

20m<sup>2</sup>/person, is highest among those born outside Europe. At the same time, the proportion of foreign-born is increasing among the homeless groups in Sweden. These factors will be discussed in the next few pages of this thesis.

Given all the aspects discussed above, one can consider that housing construction in Sweden is decided by the industry today. The tragedy is that these decisions are taken based on who can buy what they build, but not the need for housing by the common people. Even though municipalities have a responsibility in supplying houses in terms of social benefits, the housing industry with profit motives has become more dominant in housing supply. This has created a shortage of affordable apartments for common people. As Listerborn (2019) highlights, today's Swedish housing market has two extreme ends; on one end, the rich having many options for housing, while at the other end, the poor struggling to have a roof over their heads. In my opinion, the profit-driven housing industry cannot be blamed alone for the nature of Swedish housing sector for which it is today, whereas the state or the municipalities have to do more to protect the vulnerable groups in the housing market.

As stated earlier, housing issues are tied to the urbanisation process. Sweden has identified rapid population growth, shortage of dwellings in fastest-growing cities, and pressure on land use as major challenges in this process (Government offices of Sweden, 2016). As such, housing issues cannot be discussed without referring to population patterns. Therefore, I would like to present the population trends as an entry to discuss housing issues in Sweden.

The population of Sweden has increased during the last five years from 9,851,017 (2015) to 10,327,589 (2019). The urban population shows a more significant increase, as the population density in urban areas has increased by 34 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> since 2015. More prominent increases in population can be observed in larger cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. At the end of 2018, 87 percent of Sweden's population had been living in urban areas.

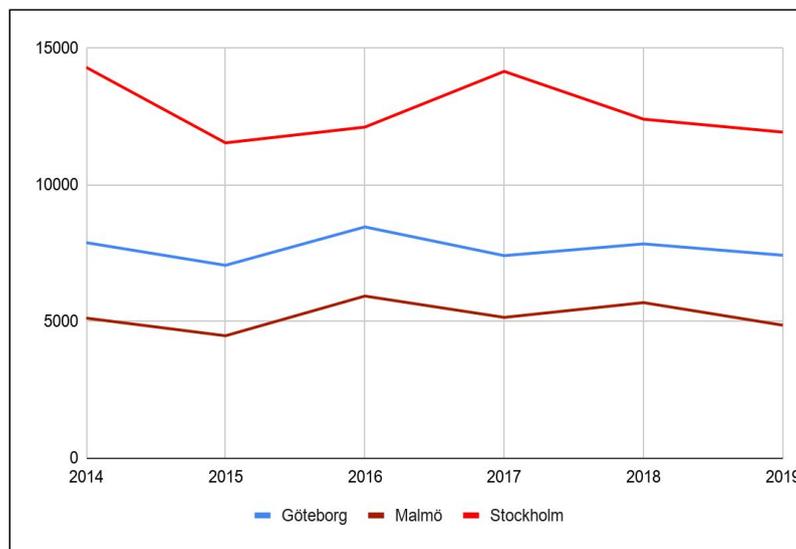
**Table 6.1: Population in major cities**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Stockholm	911,989	923,516	935,619	949,761	962,154	974,073
Gothenburg	541,145	548,190	556,640	564,039	571,868	579,281
Malmö	318,107	322,574	328,494	333,633	339,313	344,166

*Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB).*

The table indicates that almost 10 percent of the country's population live in the capital, and approximately 18 percent of the population live in its three largest cities. Annual population increase in Stockholm and Gothenburg had been more than 5000 per year since 2014, and had shown significant increases between 2015 - 2016. Malmö's population, which had an annual increase below 5,000, has been increased by 5,920 in the same period.

One can observe that population increases in major cities do not show a uniform pattern. As shown in Figure 6.1 all three cities have significant increase in population changes during 2015 - 2016. These trends may be a result of increased refugee accommodation during the period. In Malmö too, the population increase has been more than 5,000 during this period. However, during 2016-2017 the population increase in Gothenburg and Malmö had decreased while Stockholm showed a significant increase. This may be a result of less number of people moving to those two cities and more moving to the capital city seeking better opportunities.

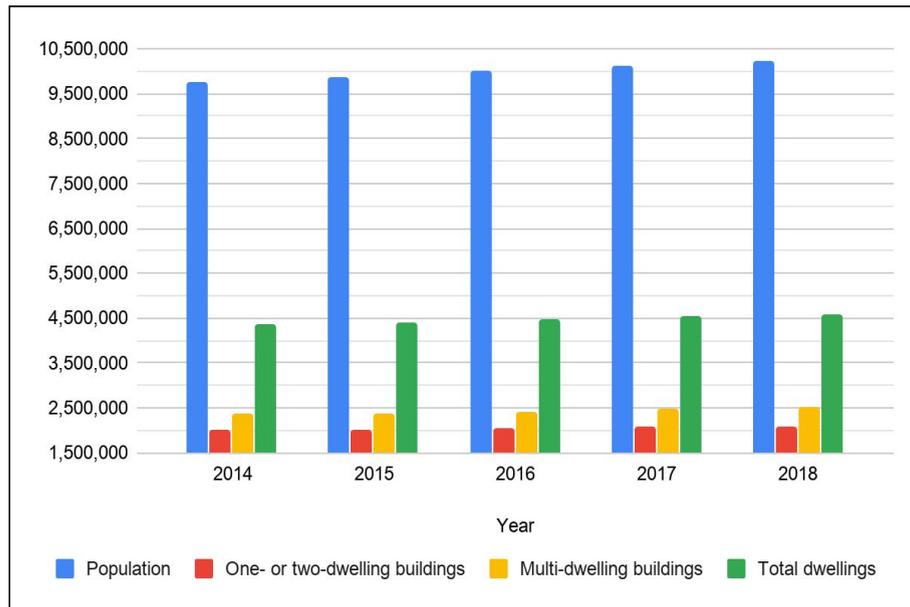


Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB).

**Figure 6.1: Changes in population increase**

These population moving patterns are significant for refugees' settlement in Sweden as they also face the same challenges in urban areas where the majority of Swedish population (87%) is living. Moreover, the vulnerable status of refugees often place them in high-density areas within the cities, making them live in overcrowded apartments.

Although Sweden's population has grown significantly over the last few years, housing supply has been unable to keep pace with the population growth. Figure 6.2 shows the increase in numbers of dwellings in parallel to population increase in Sweden.



Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)

**Figure 6.2: Population and number of dwellings in Sweden**

**Dwellings:** Buildings used for residential purpose.

**One- or two-dwelling buildings :** detached buildings as well as semi-detached, row and linked buildings.

**Multi-dwelling buildings:** buildings with three or more apartments

(Source: Statistics Sweden, SCB).

It can be observed from Figure 6.2 that there has been no significant increase in the number of dwellings since 2014. The increase in the number of total dwellings from 2014 to 2018 is 225,296 against the population increase of 482,830. It is also noticeable that multi-dwellings are built more than the one- or two-dwelling buildings. The lack of dwellings has led to increased demand and increased prices, affecting low-income groups. This places refugees at a vulnerable status in the housing market when they move out from housing provided by municipalities.

The low numbers of housing construction imposes serious challenges for municipalities as it affects their housing stock. The Housing Market Survey conducted by the Swedish Housing Agency (Boverket) indicates that most Swedes live in municipalities with deficits in housing. Out of 290 municipalities in the country, 212 have indicated housing deficiencies. Many municipalities suffer from limited housing construction and lack of housing for those groups having a weak position in the housing market (Boverket, 2020a).

The major reason for the low number of dwellings being added to housing stock is that Sweden's construction sector suffers from very high costs. It is considered the highest in Europe. whereas it has been estimated that building a house in Sweden is approximately 70 percent more expensive than the European average (Malmö Stad, 2018).

When housing cost for inhabitants is considered, the average cost of housing per household is SEK 80,000 per year. This varies according to the type of tenure as well as the region or the city. Swedes spend approximately 20.8 percent of their disposable income as housing cost, albeit it may vary according to many factors. Those who are living in owner-occupied one or two-dwelling houses spend a lower percentage such as 14.6 percent of their income, while those in rented dwellings have to spend 28.2 percent of their disposable income as housing cost. The higher percentage is not caused merely by the prices, but due to lower incomes of inhabitants in rented dwellings (Statistikmyndigheten, 2016). This implies that certain groups may have to sacrifice some of their other needs in order to fulfill the basic need of housing. Most municipalities have stated that it is difficult for young people who want to move out from their parents' homes, and newcomers to establish themselves in the housing market (Boverket, 2020a). The 'newcomers' involve natives who move to a new municipality as well as immigrants, including refugees.

Newcomers, especially refugees often become a vulnerable group in the housing market due to absence of knowledge on the market, lack of social contacts, and of course, due to their low economic status. Refugees almost never get an opportunity to access a first hand rental apartment in major cities that have very long waiting lists. These first hand rental agreements are signed between the owner of the apartment or the housing company, and the tenant. The usual method of accessing such rental apartments without any middle party's involvement is to register in the respective municipality's housing queue, with an annual payment to the municipality. Once an apartment becomes vacant, the first person in the queue gets the opportunity to rent it. These housing queues are rather long in large cities, whereas (Hansson, 2019) has pointed out that applicants in Stockholm have to wait for an average of 8–16 years before having access to an apartment. This period has been estimated as 3.5–6.5 years in Gothenburg, the second largest refugee-receiving municipality in Sweden.

This may compel refugees moving out from accommodation facilities to access the second hand rental market. In the second hand contracts, the person who has the contract with the actual owner of the apartment, rents it to another person for a short period of time. Sometimes this may occur without the consent of the landlord. These rents usually do not exceed one year, and those who access second hand rents have to move from place to place. Further, the rents can be higher than the normal rents, because the person who is renting knows that those who buy are in desperate need for housing. This creates many issues for refugees and they may even become homeless due to the insecure nature of the illegal second hand housing contracts.

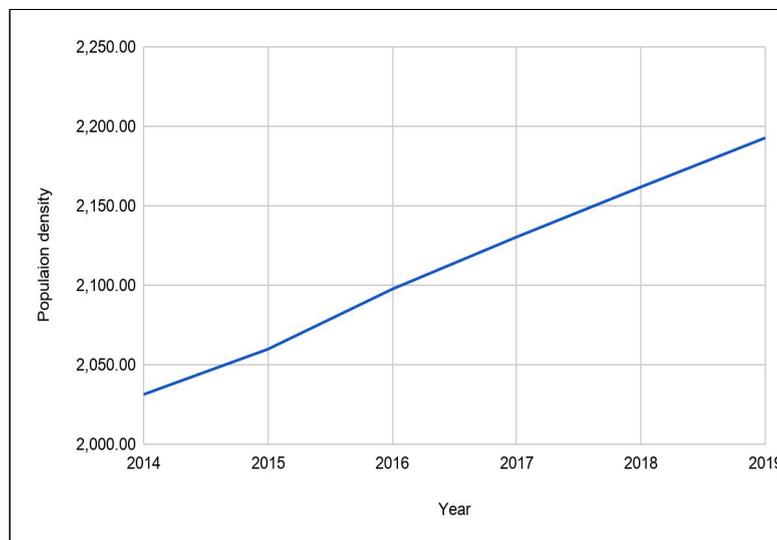
## 6.2 Malmö: context of housing and its effects on refugees

### *Population changes*

Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden. Its population has significantly increased during the last five years; from 318,107 in 2014 to 344,166 in 2019. One of the major contributing factors to population growth is the large number of people, including the refugees moving to the city. Malmö has inhabitants from 184 different countries, who have moved in due to different reasons such as; to study, work, seek protection or to reunite with family members. The largest group comes from Iraq, followed by Syria and Yugoslavia (Malmö Stad, 2020a).

The introduction of the “Settlement Act (2016-02-04): Law (2016: 38) on the reception of certain newly arrived immigrants for residence”, has made municipalities responsible for arranging housing for refugees assigned to them. This imposes more pressure on the already tight housing sector of the municipality. The number of refugees who moved to Malmö (assigned by the Migrationverket and those who moved to their own housing) was 955 in 2019. The largest group of refugees are persons arranging their own accommodation (Eget Boende, EBO) which was 912 in 2019 (Migrationverket, 2020).

As a result of population increase the population density has increased from 2,131.3 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in 2014 to 2,192.8/km<sup>2</sup> in 2019. Figure 6.3 shows the increase of population density in Malmö.



Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)

**Figure 6.3: Population density in Malmö.**

It can be noted that there is a sharp increase after 2015, which can be attributed to the influx of a large number of refugees to the country and a significant volume of them moving to Malmö. Increasing population density and overcrowding in areas with a high proportion of newcomers leads to reduced space per household, which may affect the physical and mental well-being of inhabitants. As stated earlier, people with foreign backgrounds are living in

overcrowded situations than the natives in Sweden. Concentration of newcomers in a small area increases the competition for services and employment opportunities.

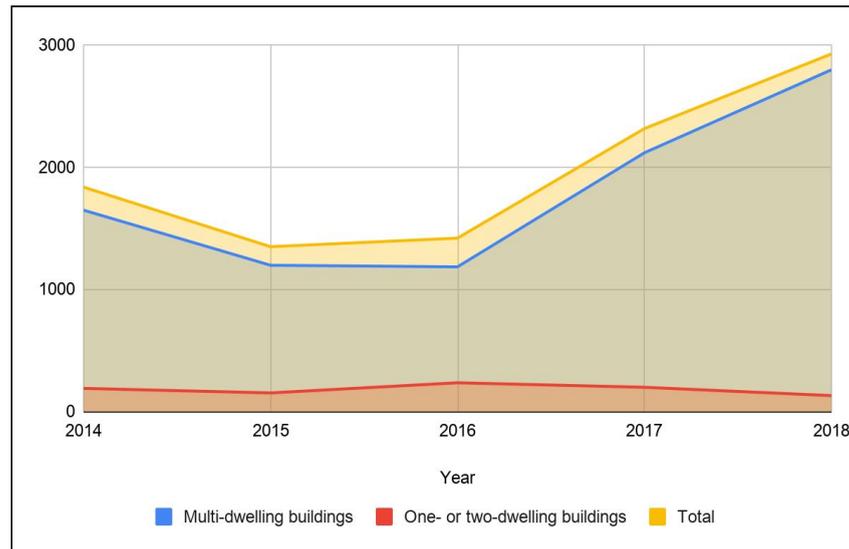
### *Housing stock*

The population of Malmö shows an average increase of 5,000 per year (ref: figure 6.1) whereas the annual increase in housing stock is approximately 1,500. However, 3,390 new homes were built in 2019, mainly in the expanding areas of Hyllie, Norra Sorgenfri, Västra Hamnen and the Limhamn port area. Yet, housing construction in Malmö has not met the need generated by the annual population increase, which has led to a growing housing shortage. It has been estimated that 20,000 new houses are needed in the next 10 years to supply for housing needs of Malmö's growing population (Malmö Stad, 2020b).

In comparison to population growth, the number of dwellings in Malmö has increased from 151,885 in 2014 to 161,909 in 2018. The housing stock consists of; one- or two-dwelling buildings (16.8%), multi-dwelling buildings (79%) as well as special housing (4.2%) such as housing for elderly, and student housing.

The type of dwelling is an important feature that determines the living space of inhabitants. Those who live in one- or two dwelling buildings, with ownership rights, have been recorded to have the maximum space per person, i.e. 47m<sup>2</sup>/person, while those with tenants rights or rental rights have an average of 40 - 41m<sup>2</sup>/person. The condition is different for multi-dwelling buildings, i.e. those buildings with more than three apartments have 39m<sup>2</sup>/person for tenant-owned apartments, and 34m<sup>2</sup>/person in rented apartments (Statistikmyndigheten, 2020).

Figure 6.4 clearly reflects that the construction of multi-dwelling houses has shown a significant increase since 2016. It indicates that more and more people are living in low space, and may be in cramped housing conditions. It can be assumed that groups with lowest levels of income, with a high representation of refugees, are living in rented apartments in multi-dwelling buildings. This cramped housing conditions would be more problematic for refugees who have comparatively larger households than the Swedish. This will be further explained with the size of dwellings.



*Multi-dwelling includes special housing too (housing for students and elderly etc.)  
Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)*

**Figure 6.4: New constructions of dwellings in Malmö**

Although the annual addition to housing stock is more than 1,000, and housing construction is in an increasing trend, still there are groups who cannot access the housing market. This may be explained by what Grander (2018, p.4) indicates that “the shortage of dwellings, mainly experienced by people with limited income, is not actually the lack of housing, but the increasing differences in housing opportunities between different social groups”.

#### *Size of dwellings*

According to the Sweden’s Housing Agency survey (Boverket, 2020b), 76 municipalities have deficits of large apartments. When considering the housing stock in Malmö, about 20 percent are in detached houses and 80 percent are in apartment buildings. As can be seen in Table 6.2, the most common housing sizes are two or three rooms and kitchen, which adds to about 85 percent of the housing stock. The average area per person in dwelling in Malmö is 36 m<sup>2</sup> compared to 42m<sup>2</sup> in average Sweden (Malmö stad, 2018).

**Table 6.2: Size of rented public dwellings in Malmö, 2018**

Size of dwelling	Number of dwellings	Percentage
1 room and kitchen	14,004	10.2
1 room and kitchenette	9,762	7.1
2 rooms and kitchen	49,240	36.0
2 or more rooms with kitchenette	1,922	1.4
3 rooms and kitchen	43,237	31.6
4 rooms and kitchen	14,834	10.8
5 rooms and kitchen	3,121	2.3
6 or more rooms and kitchen	741	0.5

Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)

The size of dwellings and the household size determine an important feature in refugee housing in Sweden. The household is considered as a group of persons who share a common shelter, i.e. the number of people living in a house. This number varies across the world, with less than three persons per household in Europe and Northern America, to five or more persons per household in Africa and the Middle East (UN Population Division, 2017, pp. 1-2). Considering the high refugee share of Malmö's population, most of them coming from non-European countries such as Iraq and Syria, this signifies that the housing sector does not meet the need of larger apartments for large households.

#### *Affordability*

There is no uniform system to apply for housing in Sweden. The existing rent setting system is a collective, local bargaining system. Housing rents are negotiated between property owners and the Tenants Association. For example, the average annual housing rent in MKB properties have been SEK 1,195/m<sup>2</sup> in 2016. It has been slightly higher than the average in Sweden's other municipalities (SEK 961/m<sup>2</sup>), and higher than both Stockholm (SEK 1,169 /m<sup>2</sup>) and Gothenburg (SEK 1,053 / m<sup>2</sup>) (Malmö Stad, 2018).

The rents of apartments have been gradually increasing since 2016 and they differ according to location. Table 6.3 shows how the average rent of a rented apartment differs within Malmö municipality.

**Table 6.3: Average annual rent SEK/ m<sup>2</sup> of an apartment**

District	Examples of neighbourhood	2016	2017	2018	2019
Inner City	Ribersborg, Rönneholm, Möllevången, Norra Sofielund, Västra Sorgenfri	1,189	1,217	1,252	1,264
North	Bulltofta, Ellstorp, Malmöhus, Värnhem, Västra hamnen	1,307	1,312	1,353	1,376
South	Almhög, Eriksfält, Frederiksberg, Hindby, Nydala	1,075	1,078	1,102	1,156
West	Gröndal, Hyllieby, Hyllievång, Lindeborg, Nya Bellevue	1,159	1,196	1,273	1,367
East	Elisedal, Höja, Kvarnby, Rosengård Centrum, Virentofta	964	976	1,043	1,046
MALMÖ (average)		1,173	1,194	1,248	1,267

Source: *Statistics Sweden (SCB)*

The rents differ according to size of apartment and year of construction too. However, the above table indicates a spatial segregation pattern, where west and north Malmö have relatively higher rents. Lowest rents are shown in East of Malmö, which are lower than the average value. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Malmö shows a segregation pattern among West and the East in terms of housing. This shows that spatial distribution of housing acts as a factor that creates segregation within cities. It can also indirectly lead to ‘ethnic segregation’ as the houses in the west are mostly owner-occupied by natives, while there is a large concentration of immigrants in public housing in the east. Andersen et al. (2016) argue that the relationship between housing and ethnic segregation in cities is dependent mainly on housing structures in the city, not only on housing demand and population characteristics. This argument is based on the fact that housing structures are more stable and have been lasting for a longer period compared to the market demand and population characteristics. If this is the case, I agree that these segregation patterns can be interfered through relevant housing and urban development policies.

A report on sustainable urban development in Sweden, which is published by the Swedish Research Council Formas (2011, p.24) indicates that “ outmigration of the Swedish middle class has meant more for ethnic segregation than the in-migration of underprivileged ethnic

minorities into the large-scale housing areas of the 60s and 70s". Therefore, it can be assumed that segregation within cities is created by the housing choices of high-income groups, not those low-income immigrant groups.

It is inevitable that people with low-income groups moving to areas with lower rents. The low-income groups that may have higher representation of refugees moving into these areas may cause natives to move out from that area. This segregation process, which I discussed as 'white flight', under research context may lead to stereotypical, immigrant neighbourhoods. As indicated by Cars (2009), even before the huge turning point of the 2015 refugee crisis, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö had shown the most evident segregation patterns in Sweden, and the issue is mostly found within the public housing rental sector. Andersson et al., (2010) highlight the possibility of certain neighbourhoods becoming victims of polarisation due to socio-economic- based housing inequalities This is well observed in areas such as Rosengård, which is stigmatised as an immigrant-dense neighbourhood.

As explained by Grander (2018, p.38), the quality of housing; the quality of the dwelling itself and the quality of neighbourhood, is one of the factors that cause housing inequalities. The other factor, access or affordability depends on the income level, where the prices are determined by the location or the neighbourhood too. Although there is a rent negotiation system through tenants associations, Baeten et al. (2017), emphasise that the market is playing a more dominant role in the housing sector. With less state regulations, housing companies enjoy greater freedom in deciding the rental conditions. As a result, the housing market works poorly for those who are with a weaker economy.

Job market and income levels are other important factors in deciding one's position in the housing market. A large proportion of Malmö's households have low ability to pay. As many as 20,000 households can have difficulties to demand a newly built home, and three quarters of these cannot afford a home in the existing housing stock. Many of them are young or have moved to the city directly from abroad (Malmö Stad, 2018). When the employment levels are considered, Malmö has a large proportion of its population in the working age of 20 - 64 year (62%) compared to the average (57%) of Sweden. Furthermore, Malmö has a young population, almost half (49%) of Malmö's population is under the age 35, who are willing to move out from their parents' houses (Malmö Stad, 2020b). All these factors contribute to increased demand for housing, while the relatively low employment rates puts more pressure on the municipalities and the public housing stock. As a result, refugees are pushed further down in the housing market.

### *Homelessness*

When 'right to housing' is decided by factors such as income levels, employment and ethnicity, the vulnerable groups are easily pushed into homelessness. Total homeless people in Sweden has increased from 17,834 in 2005 to 33,269 in 2017. The homelessness of Swedish nationals, however, has decreased from 74 percent in 2005 to 57 percent in 2017, whereas the

same has increased for those with migration-background, from 26 percent in 2005 to 43 percent in 2017. The main contributor to the homelessness is indicated as the housing shortage, especially within the rental sector (Knutagård, 2017). However, up to now, Sweden lacks a national homelessness strategy to address the issues faced by the homeless and to control the factors leading to homelessness (Knutagård et al., 2019, p.4).

Malmö Stad (2019) reported 1355 homeless adults in Malmö as of 1st October 2019. The biggest cause is structural homelessness, which implies that people do not have economic strength to acquire a place to live. This number is 727 adults and 692 children. The number of adults who became homeless due to social factors such as abuse and drug addiction (social homeless) is 628. A large part of the increasing structural homelessness is made up of relatively newly arrived immigrants with a weak connection to the housing market (Malmö stad, 2018, p.28).

At present, Sweden's homelessness is identified under four categories: i) acute homelessness that includes those who actually live on the road, ii) people who live in institutions, iii) those who are provided with long term secondary housing contracts by the municipality, and iv) those who are living on short-term housing arrangements with friends or relatives, or may be on subcontracts that normally lasts less than three months. Majority of homeless people are given long-term social contracts for housing by the municipality (Knutagård et al., 2019, p.5). As the assigned refugees too, are provided housing using these limited social housing contracts, the municipality faces an extra burden with the increasing number of refugees.

#### *Role of housing companies*

It is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure that everyone lives in good housing. As 'social housing' does not exist in Sweden, public housing companies had been established since the 1940s to serve this purpose. Working along the path of universal housing policy, the role of these companies has been to provide housing opportunities for the residents of that municipality regardless of their income or social class (Cars, 2009). Malmö municipality tries to achieve this through MKB Fastighets AB, which is one of Sweden's largest public housing companies. The company is owned by the city of Malmö and has 23,815 apartments. It has been estimated that one sixth of Malmö's population live in MKB properties (MKB Fastighets AB, 2020). Although the mission of public housing companies is expected to be creating equal housing opportunities for all, there is no guarantee that they serve the poor in the municipality. The main reason behind can be considered as legislation of 2011 that enabled them to function on profits-based principles (Knutagård et al., 2019, p.6).

As discussed earlier, there is a large variation in Malmö's housing stock, in terms of size, attractiveness and type of tenure. MKB Fastighets AB also has three geographically-based divisions of their properties: i) Location-A: central Malmö and the western parts of the city (ex. Västrahamnen, Ribersborg, Limhamn), ii) Location-B: areas close to the centre (Ex. Lorensborg, Värnhem, Persborg), and iii) Location-c: mainly 'million programme' areas (ex.

Kroksbäck, Nydala, Rosengård) (MKB Fastighets AB, 2019). The apartments in these locations differ from each other in attractiveness (my observation based on Google maps) and proximity to the city centre. The rents of these apartments may differ accordingly. This proves that even the municipal housing companies have to function under the competitive, profit-driven housing market. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that refugees would benefit from public housing, as housing affordable for them may be those located in isolated areas of the city, far from employment opportunities.

As a public housing company, 10 -15 percent of MKB's new production is left to Malmö municipality, based on land allocation agreements. During the period of 2017 - 2019, a total of 600 apartments had been transferred as transitional apartments (MKB Fastighets AB, 2019). These apartments are used by Malmö municipality to provide housing for the homeless under social contracts. These can be considered as a second hand contract, because it is the municipality who signs the agreement with the housing company, and then rents it to the needy persons. The municipality acts as a mediator in this sense, which ensures the tenure security for the tenants. However, the municipality has no choice over the locations of apartments transferred by the housing companies. These apartments may be from unattractive areas of the city, as it would be costly for the housing company to give away apartments in attractive areas with high demand. Information on the locations (A, B, or C) of these apartments transferred by the MKB Fastighets was not available in their annual reports.

#### *Housing for newcomers*

Refugees who come to urban areas have to compete for resources such as housing with other migrants and also the urban poor. The reasons that attract refugees to urban areas may differ from others, since they may be mostly concentrated in cities due to safety and easy access to social networks, humanitarian assistance etc. Although they fall under the protection of host states according to international law, it makes no difference to other migrants in their living experience and challenges in urban areas (Jacobson, 2006).

The housing market survey conducted by Boverket (Boverket, 2020b) has revealed that more than half of the municipalities in Sweden find it difficult to provide housing for new arrivals. Out of 290 municipalities, 147 have indicated that they have a housing deficit for assigned refugees while 198 municipalities have indicated deficits of housing for self-settled refugees (EBO). In addition to the general deficit of rental apartments, 76 municipalities have indicated deficits of large apartments for families with more than two children. As I have indicated earlier, the refugees may have more than five members in a family. Another major issue is that landlords make demands on stable income sources and employment, and are reluctant to accept establishment compensation as an income source. Forty municipalities have stated that landlords do not approve establishment compensation as an income, while fourteen municipalities have landlords who do not want to rent out to newcomers at all. A study conducted in Sweden by Ahmed and Hammarstedt (2008) indicate existence of both ethnic and gender discrimination in the Swedish rental housing market. The results of their

research reveal that males with Arabic or Muslim names receive far less response rates for inquiries related to housing from landlords than those with Swedish names.

These factors suggest that it is difficult for refugees to enter the housing market and get a first-hand contract for a home that suits their needs. At the same time discriminatory attitudes, where the newcomers are not treated equally as the natives in the housing market make it further difficult for refugees to have access to housing. My opinion is that these factors function as barriers to refugees' establishment, the ultimate result being the failure in Sweden's refugee integration process.

Through the analysis presented in this section I tried to discuss the housing issues in Sweden, particularly in Malmö and how they affect refugees and their integration into Swedish society. Housing inequalities that Sweden, particularly the major cities of Sweden experience today can be considered as a result of several policy reforms as discussed at the beginning. When considered with refugees, in addition to their economically vulnerable status, discriminatory attitudes make their situation worse. As indicated earlier, they are more prone to be exploited in a housing-based black market, placing them in insecure tenure conditions, while being compelled to live in over-crowded, segregated areas often paying more for substandard houses. I consider all these issues as the state's failure to provide adequate housing for refugees. At the same time, the already existing housing issues may lead to an anti-immigrant agenda, as discussed in chapter three.

In sum, I consider that the market-driven housing sector in Sweden has made refugees one of the most vulnerable groups whose right to housing is being threatened. The state can no longer be considered as a protector of this right, which has more or less been 'hijacked' by the market. As a country that host refugees, Sweden is obliged by the UNHCR conventions as well as human rights conventions to provide housing for all without discrimination. As this cannot be fulfilled through market mechanisms, I argue that the state needs to recapture its role in the housing sector to ensure equal rights to housing for all.

## **B) Accommodating refugees**

Having discussed the nature of the housing sector and how it affects refugees in Malmö, now I will discuss my second research question; how Malmö adheres to providing adequate housing for refugees. Accordingly, this section discusses the process of accommodating refugees in Sweden, their housing during the asylum process and the strategies adopted by Malmö in providing adequate housing for them. Some special attention is provided to refugees' own-housing option - 'Eget boende' (EBO) due to its popularity among refugees. The reasons for refugees' preference for EBOs, and both its positive and negative effects will be discussed.

Through the analysis in this section I try to point out some good practices adopted in the refugee housing process as well as to identify some weaknesses that may lead to failure in the integration of refugees. The main argument I would put forward is the factors contributing to the failure of the dispersal policy, mainly the fact that it does not consider housing as an indicator in the dispersal mechanism. The Settlement Act 2016, which provides the foundation for the dispersal of refugees has been criticized by researchers such as Righard and Öberg (2019) in many aspects. The main criticism is that, although the responsibility of refugees' housing is imposed on municipalities, the Act does not provide specific guidelines or regulations as to what type of housing to be provided and the strategies to be adopted etc. Furthermore, I have identified that the EBO system interferes with the dispersal strategy, disturbing the main objectives of the Settlement Act 2016; i.e, equal distribution of refugees among municipalities and their integration.

Yet, with all the weaknesses in the settlement act, municipalities are expected to fulfill the housing needs of refugees assigned to them. Municipalities vary in challenges and opportunities involved in housing refugees, consequently adopt various strategies to fulfill the responsibility entrusted upon them. In the case of Malmö, the municipality finds it difficult to find houses for refugees in adequate size and in favourable locations. The municipality has a weak position in dealing with both the public and the private housing companies. In my opinion, this calls for a restructuring of the Swedish housing market.

### **6.3 Sweden as a refugee receiving country**

Sweden is a signatory to the Convention relating to the status of refugees adopted by the United Nations Conference in 1951 (Geneva Convention) and its protocol adopted in 1967. Thus, Sweden has been receiving refugees since the 1950s and has taken a great responsibility in their resettlement.

As the countries in the Europe region serve as prime destinations for refugees, the European Union has agreed upon a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in 1999, which is also based on the principles of the Geneva Convention. The objective of the CEAS is to come into common agreements on regulations related to accommodating refugees within EU member states (European Commission, 2018). Furthermore, the European Council, in 2004, adopted Common Basic Principles (CBPs) for immigrant integration within the EU countries. These principles are focussed on non-discriminatory treatment for refugees in access to goods and services, and highlights the importance of interaction between immigrants and the host country citizens as a fundamental requirement of integration (European Commission, 2005b).

Being a member State in the EU, Sweden supports both the CEAS and the CBPs, and continues receiving refugees and sharing the responsibility of their resettlement. Sweden's migration and asylum policy indicates housing as a key to integration. Further, it emphasizes

refugees' equal access to housing as an important strategy in facilitating integration (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019). This reconfirms Swedish government's conformity to European Social Charter, that requests protection of basic human rights, including the right to housing.

#### **6.4 Refugee housing during asylum process**

Sweden receives quota refugees through the UNHCR resettlement programme, as well as those who come to the border and claim asylum. Those asylum seekers first have to register at the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) reception centres located in major cities including Stockholm, Gävle, Boden, Norrköping, Gothenburg and Malmö. Out of the total number of 21,502 applicants registered in 2018, Malmö has registered 3,951, while Stockholm has registered 11,094 and Gothenburg 3,854. (AIDA, 2018, p.19). These asylum seekers have to stay in accommodation upon arrival for 3 - 4 days until they are registered by the Migrationsverket.

Then they are moved to arrival housing provided by the Migrationsverket, where they have to stay up to 24 days until they are interviewed and their documents are checked. These facilities are located in large cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. The initial integration process commences during this time period, with the asylum seekers being provided with some basic information on the Swedish society and their expected behaviour within the society, as well as their rights and obligations.

Once the follow-up process is completed, the asylum seekers are moved to facility accommodation provided by the Migrationsverket - 'Anläggningsboende' (ABO), which can be either shared housing or ordinary apartments. The asylum seekers have to live there until a decision is given on their case.

According to the European Union laws regarding refugees, the asylum applications should be processed within six months. However, many countries fail to meet this requirement (AIDA, 2019). The Migration expert (M1) at Migrationsverket states:

“the approximate waiting time for the decision in Sweden is 800 days! If they receive a positive response and get a residence permit, they have to wait another two months, before they are transferred to a municipality” (M1, 2020.03.05).

As such, the asylum seekers have to live in accommodation facilities for approximately two and half years. I consider this as a too long period, because living in accommodation facilities for a long time may negatively affect one's physical and mental well-being. These accommodation facilities are located in several municipalities in four regions; Skåne, Kalmar, Kronobrg, and Blekinge. The Refugee housing expert (M2) at Migrationsverket elaborates:

“we call them ‘accommodation units’ and Migrationsverket has 15,000 such units, Skåne country alone has 4,000. Actually an accommodation unit is equal to one bed.” (M2, 2020.03.05)

Thus, it can be assumed that these accommodation facilities (ABOs) may not sufficiently meet the requirements of adequate housing. As I have discussed under the theory section, the right to housing is more than just having a roof over one’s head. It is a basic human right linked to other human rights such as the right to live in security and dignity. While accepting the fact that complete and full recognition of these aspects may be a difficult task, the Migrationsverket attempts are commendable.

“We always try to provide families with their own apartment, while single people have to share housing or rooms. When people share rooms, we do not allocate more than two people per room, and the two who are in the same room are selected on the basis that they are previously known to each other and speak the same language” (M2, 2020.03.05).

By providing apartments for families, the Migrationsverket tries to protect refugees’ privacy and dignity. Likewise, the reason behind selecting people known to each other as roommates was explained as ensuring the security of asylum seekers. For example, those who are coming from two different countries may have conflicting ethnic and religious norms that may place them in rivalry situations.

However, these ABOs have been widely criticized as being located in isolated areas far from the city. This has been pointed out as one of the reasons that asylum seekers prefer to arrange their own housing (EBO) in a municipality of their choice. Although the Migrationsverket provides a daily allowance of SEK 61 per adult, the prolonged stay in these accommodation facilities tend to diminish asylum seekers’ opportunities for integration and employment.

In this context, I would like to consider asylum seekers in ABOs as having a ‘cry’ for the right to the city, because they are not fully integrated into the city. They have restricted or limited opportunities for social relationships and employment. Furthermore, the refugee housing expert explained that sometimes, the Migrationsverket has to arrange temporary housing if the country receives an unexpected high number of asylum seekers. As the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden has been reducing since 2016, the Migrationsverket’s need for temporary housing has also been reduced. Table 6.3 shows the numbers of asylum seekers that arrived in Sweden during the last six years.

**Table 6.3 : Number of people that sought asylum in Sweden.**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Men	54,817	114,728	17,352	15,635	12,929	13,133
Women	26,484	48,149	11,587	10,031	8,573	8,825
Total	81,301	162,877	28,939	25,666	21,502	21,958

*Source: Migrationsverket, 2020*

*(The figures do not include those who sought asylum through Swedish embassies while staying in another country.)*

The table shows the huge influx of refugees in 2015 and then the gradual reduction with time. The present number is approximately 20,000 per year. Although the number of asylum seekers shows a decreasing trend, the capacity of the reception system can be affected by the length of the asylum period. As stated earlier, the European Union law is to process asylum applications within six months. According to a report on the reception of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe (AIDA, 2019) the asylum period in Sweden is 17 months (510 days). However, the Migration expert at the Migrationsverket indicated this as 800 days.

I would like to point out that the prolonged stay in accommodation facilities as a failure in adequate housing in psychological terms. Living in accommodation facilities for more than two years in uncertain conditions, without knowing whether they would receive residence permits to live in Sweden, makes the asylum seekers mentally stressed. Even if they receive it, they do not have any idea which municipality they are to be assigned until the last moment. Thus, they live in an anxious condition for a long time due to uncertainty of their future.

It should also be noted that not everyone seeks accommodation in Migrationsverket facilities- ABO. There is a fraction of asylum seekers who prefer to stay with friends or relatives (EBO) while waiting for the decision on residence permit. It has been indicated that approximately fifty percent of asylum seekers choose EBO (Righard and Öberg, 2019).

Studies carried out by agencies such as the Boverket have shown that EBO is more attractive for refugees than the accommodation facilities (ABO) provided by the Migrationsverket. One major reason for this has been that ABO apartments are located in remote areas with no or less labour market perspectives. Those who had been living in EBOs during the application processing period have been found to have better employment opportunities than those who were in ABO. However, living in EBOs is not without issues. Migrationsverket often complain that they face difficulties with contacting those who live in EBOs, as it has been found that many asylum seekers do not live in the address they had provided to the Migrationsverket (Boverket, 2008, p.37).

As stated earlier, Sweden receives a number of refugees through its refugee quota from the UNHCR resettlement programme. These numbers are decided by the UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Sweden. The number of quota refugees received in 2018 was 5,217 and 5,253 in 2019. Approximately 5,000 have been estimated for 2020 too. Their resettlement process in Sweden is also administered by the Migrationsverket. Those who arrive in Sweden as quota refugees already have a residence permit to live in Sweden, and they are also assigned to municipalities through the Settlement Act 2016.

“Also there are some emergency cases who need quick decisions. This number is about 500 per year. Their eligibility to seek protection in Sweden is done through Swedish embassies in relevant countries, and the decision whether they can be granted residence permit is taken by the Migrationsverket. They arrive directly to municipalities assigned to them” (M1, 2020.03.05).

Although they do not impose additional pressure on Migrationsverket housing facilities, these refugees may find it more difficult to enter the housing market in respective municipalities due to lack of previous knowledge on Swedish society and language (Righard and Öberg, 2019). Even the asylum seekers that have lived in the Migrationsverket facilities for almost two and a half years tend to fail in the open housing market due to their lack of knowledge on the housing market. Responding to a question I raised, the Migration Expert at Migrationsverket states:

“we usually provide information with regard to Swedish Law, how refugees should behave in the society, and they should never abuse their spouse etc. But we do not give any specific information or guidance with regard to the housing market” (M1, 2020.03.05).

I consider this as a major drawback in refugee accommodation strategy, where housing is considered as the key to integration. It seems that Migrationsverket does not pay adequate attention to housing aspects, but refugees' behaviour. Maybe they are of the view that housing is entirely municipalities' responsibility, thus they should not interfere. On the other hand, as housing sectors differ in each municipality, Migrationsverket may find it difficult to provide information on all municipalities.

A well-managed refugee reception system needs flexibility and adaptability as essential features. Although EU law does not have any provision with regard to this, many EU countries have contingency planning in their refugee policies, especially after the 2015 refugee crisis. These planning can be of any form of strategies, whereas Sweden, in particular the Migrationsverket has regular forecasts of asylum seekers (AIDA, 2019). I assume that this enables the preparedness of the reception system in Sweden to face housing issues of refugees during the asylum process. But, whether this preparedness applies to municipalities in housing refugees is questionable.

Table 6.4 shows the total number of asylum seekers registered in Migrationsverket reception system regardless of their asylum states. It can be seen that although the number of people who claim asylum by coming to the border (as shown in Table 6.3). is gradually decreasing, the total number of asylum seekers is at a higher level. Therefore, the pressure on municipalities in housing refugees cannot be underestimated. As indicated earlier, 147 municipalities have difficulties in providing housing for assigned refugees, while 198 municipalities have indicated that refugees who try to settle by themselves have many difficulties in entering the housing market of the municipalities selected by them (Boverket, 2020b).

**Table 6.4: Number of asylum seekers registered in Migrationsverket reception system**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Men	51 672	125 355	84 050	52 651	34 108	24 367
Women	27 715	56 555	38 658	23 989	18 457	15 945
Total	79 387	181 890	122 708	76 640	52 565	40 312

*Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB)*

Once the asylum seekers who reside in Migrationsverket’s facilities receive a positive response, i.e. they receive refugee status, they are transferred to a municipality. This transfer is done through the county administrative boards of Sweden’s 21 regions (counties). The directive for this is provided by the Settlement Act introduced by the Swedish Government in 2016. The objectives of this Act are to speed up the transfer process as well as to ensure the geographical distribution of refugees across the whole country. As such, the purpose of the Settlement Act can be considered as reducing the burden of some municipalities, that are considered as refugee hotspots. For example, “Malmö used to have a large number of refugees because it has been an industrial town, and people did not require higher education qualifications to get jobs in factories or industries” (M1).

In 2018, 19,418 persons were assigned to municipalities, after receiving their residence permits. Out of them 7,162 had already been living in EBO and could remain in the same municipality, as the Settlement Act 2016 does not apply to them (AIDA, 2018). In addition, those who are willing to choose EBO after receiving the residence permit can arrange it in any municipality they prefer.

#### *Role of Länsstyrelsen*

The regional county administrative boards (Länsstyrelsen) are responsible for deciding on the number of refugees each municipality in the region receives. Länsstyrelsen plays a major role in refugee integration efforts at regional levels, and works in collaboration with the

municipalities, government agencies such as the Migrationsverket and the Employment Agency (Arbetsförmedlingen). The Länsstyrelsen has been involved in establishment of immigrants since 2011, “and in 2018, the Government decided that we should take the overall responsibility in allocating refugees to municipalities according to guidelines of the Settlement Act ” says the Integration Development Officer (L) at Länsstyrelsen Skåne.

The Settlement Act 2016 states:

Section 5: A municipality is obliged to receive a new arrival for residence in the municipality.

Section 7: The allocation of instructions between municipalities shall take into account the municipality's labor market conditions, population size, total reception of newly arrived and unaccompanied children and the extent of asylum seekers staying in the municipality.

(Sveriges Riksdag, 2016).

It is the state (central government) that decides on the number of new arrivals at regional level. Then the Länsstyrelsen distributes them among their respective municipalities. For example, Skåne county received 1,800 refugees in 2018 and 1,032 in 2019. The estimation for 2020 is 769 (Länsstyrelsen Skåne, 2020). They are to be distributed among its 33 municipalities that are made up of varying issues as well as opportunities for newcomers. “However, we try to distribute refugees evenly to municipalities in a way to provide them better conditions for establishment. Yet the challenge is to work with 33 municipalities all at once ” (L).

Once the numbers are decided for municipalities, they have to work in collaboration with the Migrationsverket, who develops a plan giving the time of the year that the municipality would receive refugees. This does not involve those who decide to arrange their own accommodation (EBO). Therefore, the respective municipalities are supposed to find housing only for the people allocated to their particular municipality. For example, Malmö received 155 refugees in 2018, who are in need of housing (Länsstyrelsen Skåne, 2020). The number of assigned refugees for Malmö was 43 for 2019, compared to 952 self-settled refugees (EBO) who came to Malmö in the same year (Migrationsverket, 2020). What I would like to emphasise here is that, although the municipality has no responsibility with providing housing for EBO refugees, their presence in the municipality adds to the competition in the housing market. This is recognised by Länsstyrelsen:

“this year (2020) we are not allocating any refugees to Malmö because they have a large number of EBO refugees. But, we will allocate more refugees to Lund during the year” (L, 2020.03.20).

I consider this as a good strategy, because anyone who finds a job in Malmö can travel to Malmö by train within less than 15 minutes. It will reduce the burden on Malmö's refugee housing needs, at least by a few numbers.

According to the Settlement Act, the negotiations between the Länsstyrelsen and the municipalities are based on employment opportunities, population and the number of refugees already living in that municipality. The government's intention is that those municipalities that have a comparatively good labor market, large population, and low numbers of already settled refugees may receive more new arrivals (Holmlin and Jönsson, 2019).

Yet, availability of housing, or rather access to housing, one of the most essential needs of refugees is not part of these negotiations.

“The model used by the Länsstyrelsen to distribute refugees does not consider housing availability as a component, because almost all the municipalities, especially in urban areas, have housing shortages”(L, 2020.03.20).

I consider this as a major weakness in the refugee distribution process as housing is considered as the key to establishment and integration in the host country. In recent years, major issues with regard to refugee resettlement have been related to housing. In this regard, the efforts made by the Länsstyrelsen Skåne are commendable since they initiated a network called “Skånskt Bostadsnätverk” (Skåne residential network) in 2014. The objective of this network is to achieve consensus and collaboration among many actors in order to create a balance in the housing market within the region.

Accordingly, the Länsstyrelsen Skåne supports the municipalities in developing their preparedness and capacity to receive refugees, identify issues involved, and monitor the process. Länsstyrelsen distributes funds to municipalities to support them to increase their capacities in receiving and housing refugees. Yet, the integration development officer at Länsstyrelsen Skåne states:

”providing adequate housing for refugees is not our responsibility, and it is not the government's responsibility too. It is totally the municipality’s responsibility”(L, 2020.03.20).

This indicates that municipalities have the ultimate responsibility in implementing the Settlement Act 2016. My opinion is that the central government and other agencies such as the Swedish Housing Agency and the Employment Agency should be more involved in its implementation, if its objectives are to be realised.

Municipalities collaborate with public utility housing companies, private property owners and individual landlords to provide housing for those in need. A survey conducted by the Länsstyrelsen Skåne in Autumn 2019 on the housing situation of newcomers in Skåne has highlighted the major issues of housing refugees as; lack of large apartments for families, unreasonable rent levels, and landlords demanding proof of income or employment of potential tenants. The length of the housing contract for the assigned refugees is decided by

the municipality, which is normally two years, but some municipalities extend it up to four years. Twelve municipalities in Skåne offer permanent contracts immediately or after the establishment period (Holmlin and Jönsson, 2019).

Another issue highlighted by the Länsstyrelsen survey is that self-settled refugees (EBO) do not have favourable housing conditions to facilitate their establishment in the municipality and integration into the society. Their housing conditions vary on a large scale, some even have to sleep on a sofa provided by an acquaintance, usually moving from place to place, before getting a 'real' home. They often live in substandard houses and are prone to be exploited on the black market. This group is more likely to become homeless. Some municipalities have indicated that it is more difficult to work with refugees in EBO, as the authorities have no real information on those who settle by themselves (Holmlin and Jönsson, 2019).

When compared to other regions such as Stockholm, Skåne county can be considered a vulnerable region with regard to the housing market. The main reasons identified are low employment rates and low income levels, two factors that directly determine access to housing. In a context that refugees also add to unemployed and low-income groups, Länsstyrelsen Skåne considers implementing the Settlement Act 2016 a challenge for many municipalities in Skåne.

### **6.5 Refugee housing in municipalities: Malmö**

Malmö is receiving the highest number of refugees, after Stockholm and Gothenburg. In 2019, Malmö has received 989 refugees, which is "almost 3 persons per 1000 inhabitants" (Malmö Stad, 2020a). As stated earlier, the Settlement Act 2016 considers the number of refugees a municipality already hosts when assigning new refugees. The Advisory officer (S) at Malmö stad adds:

"Malmö is popular among refugees because it is easy to find a job, and even the people with low educational levels have been able to find a job. As we already have a high number of EBO refugees the number given by the Settlement Act is less now. So in 2020 Malmö will not receive any refugees through the Settlement act. But we still have no idea how many EBO refugees will arrive in 2020" (S, 2020.02.20).

It is the responsibility of Malmö municipality to arrange housing for the 'assigned refugees', i.e. who have been allocated under the Settlement Act. They are provided with apartments on the basis of 'social contracts'. As I have explained under the section on the housing context in Sweden, these contracts are 'second hand contracts' because they are signed between the landlords and the municipality. When the contracts are signed by the municipality, it ensures tenure security and offers safe housing conditions for refugees. Tenure security is considered as one of the requirements of adequate housing. It ensures legal protection against forced

eviction. Yet, the rent is paid by the refugees using the establishment allowance given by the government, and the municipality is responsible for the tenants' to pay the rent on time.

“We always try to provide apartments for refugees, and plan to accommodate only two persons in one bed room. So, if a family has six members, we have to find an apartment with three bedrooms. It is always difficult to find apartments for families who have many members.” (S, 2020.02.20).

This confirms the issues I discussed in the first part of this analysis. As I have indicated in Table 6.2, almost 85 percent of Malmö's public dwellings are with less than 3 rooms. I also reported that the average household size of families in Africa and the Middle East is five or more members. As the majority of refugees in Sweden are coming from countries such as Iraq and Syria the lack of larger size apartments creates an issue in terms of adequate housing.

As indicated by the Länsstyrelsen survey, a major issue of housing refugees in Malmö is related to private landlords and housing companies. Most housing companies in Malmö are reluctant to accept the establishment allowance as an income. Therefore, housing shortages as well as discriminatory attitudes function as challenges in finding adequate housing for newcomers (Righard and Öberg, 2019).

Sometimes, the municipalities receive a larger number of refugees than expected. Then they have to be provided with temporary housing solutions until adequate housing facilities are arranged for them.

“If there are large numbers within a short period, we have to arrange temporary houses. They are built on lands that are not planned for building houses. For example, a football ground can also be used to build temporary houses. These houses can last only for 15 years” (S, 2020.02.20)

These temporary housing are often overcrowded, and the municipality is unable to adhere to specific standards. Availability of services and facilities such as adequate sanitation and waste disposal may be issues associated with these houses. Absence of these facilities affects habitability too. According to the advisory officer at Malmö Stad, the municipality arranges some refugees living in those temporary houses themselves to clean the houses, and the municipality makes a payment for their service. In my opinion, these temporary housing deny the right to adequate housing. They are unable to provide adequate privacy, and may be security for inhabitants. This affects their mental wellbeing as well as the physical well-being, in terms of low hygienic conditions. Women may become vulnerable to abuse too.

As stated earlier, the tenure period for apartments provided for refugees vary according to the municipality.

“The refugees can live in the apartments we arrange for four years. This is usually two years in other municipalities. But the housing market is very tough in Malmö and we do not need more homeless people. Therefore, we give them four years.” (S, 2020.02.20).

As further explained by the advisory officer, the maximum tenure period has been set as four years, because if a person lives in a place for more than four years on a second hand contract, he can claim for a first hand contract. But, as the municipality needs these apartments for other newcomers, those who are in these apartments definitely have to move out at the end of tenure period. There are some municipalities that convert the second hand contracts to first hand contracts, after the probation period. Nevertheless, I consider providing a four-year tenure as a good practice adopted by Malmö municipality, as it may provide an adequate period of time for them to find housing by themselves. As four years is a fairly long period to get familiar with the area one lives in, at least most of them are able to find a place to live.

“488 refugees came to Malmö in 2016 and got apartments provided by us. Out of them, 11 families and 35 single persons still have to find their housing. Others have moved out from our apartments by now (2020)” (S, 2020.02.20).

Obtaining refugee status and moving into municipalities of a host country does not necessarily ensure adequate housing and adequate standards of living for those who were displaced from their home countries. Refugees' access to normal housing in a municipality is faced with many barriers. One of the major barriers is discriminatory attitudes displayed in renting out apartments for the non-Swedish. I have earlier indicated a research conducted by Ahmad and Hammarstedt (2008) that reported that males with Muslim names receive less responses to inquiries with regard to rental apartments. Righard and Öberg (2019) have also indicated discriminatory attitudes as a barrier for refugees in finding houses. What I would like to highlight is that discriminatory attitudes have not changed with time, considering the ten year time gap between the above two references. This hinders refugees' access to housing and functions as a barrier to adequate housing, especially when they have to move out from the accommodation provided by the municipality.

Access to housing is always determined by the number of vacant apartments and the length of the queue for rental apartments. Refugees' opportunities in entering the housing market are rather limited in the circumstances that landlords demand for proof of livelihood or sources of income. Most of the refugees are compelled to live in substandard houses and 'cramped' houses, especially in municipalities with housing shortages. Living area per person is considered as one of the indicators for the quality of housing situation. This has been

indicated as 22m<sup>2</sup>/person for newcomers compared to the national average of 42m<sup>2</sup>/person. (Boverket, 2015, p.35).

“Sometimes, some refugees cannot find their own houses, even after four years. Still, they have to move out because the municipality needs apartments for new refugees who come every year. Those who cannot find houses can apply for social service, that will provide them temporary houses for one week. This has to be done every week until they find a house” (S, 2020.02.20).

Social service- ‘Socialtjänst’ is also governed by the municipality itself under the labour market and social management unit (Arbetsmarknads- och socialförvaltningen). Anyone who faces hardships in competing in the open market for housing can reach social service for help. Some of the social services provided by the Socialtjänst consist of; financial assistance to the jobless, temporary accommodation for the homeless and assistance for those who face violence at home and child abuse. (Malmö stad, 2019). Usually, families with children are placed in hotels by the ‘Socialtjänst’, where they have to lodge until the social services find a place for them in the municipality. Other temporary housing solutions include hostels, which are often overcrowded and 50 - 75 families are constantly on queue to receive this facility (Boverket, 2015, p. 65). The number of refugees requiring social services with housing problems is increasing in Malmö. In 2006, 13 households from Hyllie only, had housing issues. Most of them had lived with relatives or friends in EBO during the asylum process, instead in housing provided by Migrationsverket (Boverket, 2008, p. 18).

#### *‘Eget boende’ (EBO)*

The refugees who decide to settle themselves (EBO) have control over their choice to select the municipality they would like to settle. To a large extent, they select to live in a metropolitan area for the convenience of finding a job. Even if they initially settle in a rural area, after a while they move into larger cities in metropolitan municipalities. The proportion of newcomers settled in metropolitan municipalities was approximately 75 percent in 2014 (Boverket, 2015, p.99). The refugees, after receiving a residence permit, have the right to all municipal services as other citizens; children are entitled to schooling, child care and health care etc. The authorities have indicated that they have issues with EBOs such as difficulties in tracking them in one location or at a given address because they tend to move around with different host families. Therefore, as Migrationsverket, municipalities too, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the EBO system (Boverket, 2008, p.6). This adds more burden to the housing market as well as the services offered by municipalities. At the same time, refugees have to face the same challenges faced by other immigrants and compete with them for housing and employment opportunities in those metropolitan areas.

The survey conducted by Boverket in 2008 has also indicated many issues refugees in EBOs face. During the asylum period they usually stay with relatives or friends, who are already

living in segregated areas. These areas are represented by higher percentages of immigrants. As I have indicated under the research context, the scenarios such as the ‘white flight’ and ‘white avoidance’ make these areas more refugee-dense. If the newcomers continue to live in the same place after receiving the residence permit, they will continue to be a ‘separate’ group in the Swedish society. It delays or fails their integration with the host society.

However, this cannot be considered entirely as a negative process. I have already discussed the research conducted by Haberfeld et al. (2019), which indicates that living with relatives or friends gives refugees more opportunities to find jobs through informal social links. As such, even the refugees who were earlier placed in localities with less number of refugees tend to move into those municipalities to be with their ‘own people’. This, however, disturbs the initial objectives of Sweden's dispersal policy of reducing the burden of certain municipalities with high refugee concentration.

The issues with EBO in refugees’ perspectives are worthwhile discussing at length. These EBO houses hardly fulfill the requirements of ‘adequate housing’. Most of them are overcrowded, which hinders the privacy of all inhabitants. The security of tenure is uncertain as the newcomers have to live on the mercy of the homeowner. Locations of these houses are mostly in segregated areas or far from the city. Sometimes, these areas may lack services such as healthcare and schooling. Habitability is always a question when inhabitants have to live in cramped housing conditions. Most severe effects of EBOs fall upon children. It has been indicated that children tend to stay outside most of the time, as the EBO houses are usually overcrowded. This affects their education and also behaviour leading to social issues. Living in overcrowded houses for a longer period becomes mentally stressful for both newcomers as well as the host families, and there can be many hygienic-related problems with poor indoor environments. Conflicts with host families is a common scenario which leads newcomers to move around changing houses several times before they are able to get their own house. This causes stress for children as they may have to change school several times or may have to travel long distances to reach school. These are long term barriers to integration and may lead to failure in the refugee resettlement process (Boverket, 2008, pp. 13-14).

Most of the refugees that arrive in Malmö are arranging their own accommodation (EBO). Almost half of those who live in EBO houses in Malmö are living in Rosengård area where they live either with acquaintances or relatives. This creates benefits as well as risks for newcomers. Thirty five households that had been granted residence permits in 2006 had turned to social services as they became homeless. These families had included 51 adults and 50 children. Most of them had been residing with someone at Rosengård (Boverket, 2008, p.18). The reasons refugees find Rosengård more attractive than the housing provided by the municipality needs to be analysed in depth. It would be helpful for Malmö municipality to improve their refugee accommodation strategies.

The refugees who are unable to find housing add to homeless people in the municipality. They are considered as structural homeless, because of their low-income status. Both groups of structural and social homeless turn to social service assistance offered by the municipality. Although the biggest contribution to homeless comes from structural causes, it was indicated that there had been 628 homeless people in Malmö in 2019 due to social reasons too (Malmö Stad, 2019). Therefore, the social services face the issue of making a balance between attending to those social homeless and the structural homeless people.

### *Role of housing companies*

As I have discussed earlier, the decision on housing construction depends on affordability, but not on the need for housing. Therefore, housing companies build apartments for people who can afford them. Refugees do not have the economic strength to afford the newly constructed apartments. At the same time, housing companies and private landlords are reluctant to rent to refugees. Therefore, the municipality intervenes.

“When housing companies build apartments, they are obliged to allocate 15 percent of their apartments to the municipality. But the new apartments are too expensive for refugees to pay the rent using their allowance. So, usually the housing companies do not allocate new apartments to the municipality. They give a portion of previously built apartments. These apartments can be located anywhere in the city” (S, 2020.02.20).

I see some issues with this arrangement, as the older apartments allocated by housing companies may not have good quality standards. The location may also be far from the city, which may restrict the inhabitants access to job and education opportunities, ultimately having an effect on the refugee integration process. Even MKB Fastighets AB, the public housing company owned by Malmö stad, has their properties in three geographically different areas; in central Malmö, areas close to the city centre, and the Million Homes Programme areas.

The location of refugee housing is an important factor determining integration. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the rental rates of apartments within Malmö city itself shows clear spatial differences. Those apartments in the Västra Hamnen and inner city areas are more expensive and those in Rosengård area are less expensive with rental rates below average rates of Malmö city. The advisory officer at Malmö stad stated earlier that housing companies are reluctant to let their apartments located in attractive areas of the city. The survey conducted by Boverket has also indicated that the reason refugees choose EBO is due to the unattractive locations of apartments offered by the municipality (Boverket, 2008, p.6).

It indicates that the apartments rented for this purpose are often located in remote areas, mainly due to the fact that landlords are not willing to rent their apartments in attractive areas for refugees. I consider this as an area that needs government intervention, if the Settlement

Act 2016 to be a success. If the refugees are compelled to live in segregation, i.e. being apart from rest and with a stereotypical identity connected to the place they live, the objective of reducing the ‘ethnic segregation’ will never be achieved.

It would have been interesting to have information on the type of housing allocated to the municipality by the MKB to be used in social contracts, and their locations etc. because they also have categorised their properties according to geographical locations. I was planning to acquire this information from the interview with the MKB correspondent. Unfortunately, the interviewee requested to cancel the interview due to the ‘Corona outbreak’. She did not agree for an on-line interview too. This information is also not available in their annual reports.

A new regulation or a law introduced at national level is always a challenge to be implemented at the local levels, because the issues and difficulties faced by municipalities are different to each other. When the Settlement Act was first introduced, many municipalities had found it difficult to implement. Initially, Malmö municipality too faced some difficulties in implementing the Act, mainly due to lack of information. According to the advisory officer at Malmö Stad, they have had some knowledge sharing and cooperation programmes with other municipalities such as Stockholm and Gothenburg to obtain a better understanding of the responsibilities entrusted by the Settlement Act. Thus, it can be assumed that the Settlement Act does not provide adequate guidance for its implementation at the local level.

“Even now, it is challenging to implement it, as we get only two months to find houses for refugees allocated to us by the Migrationsverket. There are no active civil society organizations at present to support this too” (S, 2020.02.20).

This is also one of the issues that needs the attention of the government. Given the tight competition in the Swedish housing market, and all the issues I discussed with regard to housing refugees, the two-month period provided to municipalities cannot be considered as adequate. Although it is expected that municipalities would arrange accommodation for their ‘assigned refugees’, within two months, some delays occur during this transfer process due to many issues, including difficulties in finding suitable houses by the municipality. As a result, even if people are granted residence permits, Migrationsverket is compelled to keep them in facility accommodation, which in turn they have to face difficulties in providing accommodation for new asylum seekers. Besides, refugees’ prolonged living in facility accommodation would be contrary to the obligations under EU strategies and human rights law (AIDA, 2019, p.26). This delays the refugees’ establishment in the labour market and social integration too. Sometimes, this forces the refugees to leave the ABO on their own and choose to live in EBO in a municipality of their choice. In 2018 this transfer process has been delayed by an average of 153 days (AIDA, 2018).

As the Settlement Act does not apply to self settled refugees (EBO) they cannot access municipality support if they are faced with housing related issues. They are not considered as municipality's responsibility because they have left the national refugee reception system (Righard and Öberg, 2019). Yet, both groups, refugees who have decided to go for EBOs just after receiving the residence permit and those who are supposed to move out from municipality-provided housing after four years, are facing the same challenges in the housing market.

In conclusion, Malmö municipality is facing many issues in meeting the adequate housing needs of refugees assigned to them through the Settlement Act. At the same time, the municipality cannot leave the responsibility to look into the issues faced by refugees in EBO, as they are more easily prone to be homeless. The Boverket survey (2008) has pointed out an increasing black market in providing housing for refugees, and increasing incidents of selling apartments under second hand contracts, without the approval of the original landlord, and also occasions of selling contact addresses. The practice of paying for an address, sometimes just for sleeping, has been highlighted as a common practice in Malmö and Solna in Stockholm (Boverket, 2008, p. 26).

These issues have to be solved within the context of prevailing housing shortages, high cost of construction, and discriminatory practices that prevent refugees' access to housing. Yet, bound by the Settlement Act 2016 and the conventions related to refugees, Malmö municipality is expected to protect refugees' right to adequate housing as a right to adequate standard of living, while defending their right to the city. The gaps and challenges in fulfilling these requirements will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

## 7. Concluding Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the effects of housing issues on the process of accommodating refugees in Malmö, and to identify the gaps and challenges in providing adequate housing for them. My research questions were:

- 1) What is the nature of housing issues in Malmö and how does it affect refugees?
- 2) How does Malmö adhere to providing adequate housing for refugees?
- 3) What are the gaps and challenges in providing adequate housing for refugees?

Housing issues that Sweden experiences today can be considered as a result of several policy reforms adopted by the country during the last few decades. Through this thesis I tried to emphasise that refugees are more affected by housing issues than the natives. The increasing population in Malmö along with the un-matched increase in housing construction, inequality in access to housing are the main issues in the housing sector. Factors such as limited knowledge on the housing market, shortages in larger apartments, reluctance of landlords to accept the establishment allowance as a source of income, and discriminatory attitudes towards refugees further limit their access to housing. Furthermore, use of EBO housing and the spatial distribution patterns of houses in the city lead to some sort of ‘ethnic segregation’. All these contribute to denial of refugees’ right to adequate housing and the right to the city, and most importantly failure in their integration with the host society.

This analysis identified many gaps and challenges involved in the process of accommodating refugees by Sweden and providing them with adequate housing at local level, i.e. in Malmö. The main gap lies in the Settlement Act, for it does not consider housing availability when distributing refugees to municipalities. Yet, Sweden’s asylum policy indicates ‘housing’ as the key to integration of refugees. As such, it is surprising that ‘housing’ has been left out as an indicator in its dispersal policy. It is true that almost all the municipalities have housing shortages, and many face housing inequalities. Still, I assume that the dispersal strategy should pay adequate attention to the nature of the housing sector in municipalities.

Municipalities, in the first instance, have found it a challenge to implement the Settlement Act, because the Act does not provide any specific guidelines for implementation. This is a gap identified by many other researchers too. Though Malmö municipality has participated in knowledge sharing programmes with Stockholm and Gothenburg to overcome information and knowledge gaps, the issues faced in implementing the Act differ from each other. As such, the strategies adopted in housing refugees vary across the municipalities. This pinpoints that, implementing a national regulation at the local level is a challenge for municipalities. My opinion is that some national level guidance and monitoring mechanism is needed to make the state efforts of refugee integration a success.

Although the refugee law recommends that asylum applications should be processed within six months, it takes more than two years in Sweden for asylum seekers to receive their residence permit. This is a major gap in the refugee accommodation process. The more the asylum seekers remain in refugee accommodation facilities, the more they are denied from the right to adequate housing. Moreover, it delays their opportunities in establishing in the job market and integration into the host society.

Once the asylum seekers are granted residence permits, the municipalities have only two months to arrange accommodation for the refugees assigned to them. Considering the prevailing housing issues in Sweden, I assume this time period as grossly inadequate. It is a challenge for the municipalities to negotiate with housing companies to arrange housing for a relatively large number of households within two months. Furthermore, it was revealed that the municipalities are expected to shoulder the full responsibility of housing refugees. The gap in this process is that there is no participatory approach to solve housing issues of refugees. There are no civil society organisations to support Malmö municipality in housing refugees. Although the municipality has occasional meetings with the employment agency Arbetsformedlingen, there is no evidence that they or any other government agency is actively involved in housing refugees.

Refugees' right to information is an accepted practice in their resettlement process. The Migrationsverket as well as the municipalities provide them information on the law of the country, their rights and obligations etc. during their establishment period. Still, none of the government agencies provide them with specific information on how the country's housing sector functions, and advice on how they could tap the housing market etc. I consider this as a major gap in the resettlement process, as housing is one of their fundamental needs, and one of the biggest issues the authorities face.

Many gaps in the refugee housing process can be attributed to policy failures, which may be beyond the purview of municipalities' jurisdiction. Lack of social housing or the subsidised housing and housing allowances for low- income and other vulnerable groups can be considered as an issue that needs state intervention. However, the lack of regulations to control the illegal second hand markets, according to my opinion, is a gap in municipal strategies. At the same time, the municipalities should be able to have some sort of control over public housing companies as to the locations of transitional apartments allocated to the municipality. The municipalities may seek the possibility of having regulations to approve refugees' establishment allowance as a source of income, and make it acceptable to landlords.

Throughout the analysis I have come across evidence to consider the EBO mechanism as interfering with the objectives of the Settlement Act. The main intention of the Act is to reduce the burden on municipalities considered as refugee hotspots. Yet, as EBO allows refugees to live in any municipality of their choice, most of the refugees arrange their own housing among their 'own people' in refugee-dense neighbourhoods. Furthermore, even the

refugees who were allocated to certain municipalities under the settlement act, later move into these areas. Thus, the exact opposite of the settlement act's objectives occur under the EBO system. Although I have indicated that the humanitarian aspects of dispersal policies is rather questionable, I cannot conclude that EBOs are better than the 'no-choice' dispersal policy. The challenge for municipalities is to regulate EBO mechanism, and internal migration of refugees, so that it does not create an extra burden on the housing stock of refugee-dense municipalities.

The arrangement of housing within a city, can create spatial segregation and has a tendency in leading to 'ethnic segregation'. Spatial segregation could be prevented by municipalities by adopting appropriate regulations in land allocation for housing construction. It is a huge challenge to prevent the emergence of stereotypical neighbourhoods such as Rosengård.

Malmö already has a higher rate of homelessness. Most of the homeless citizens are applying for long-term social contracts to get a roof over their head. Providing housing solutions for refugees through social contracts impose an extensive demand on social services. Thus, it is a challenge to keep a balance between social contracts offered to refugees and the native vulnerable groups. This is an area that needs attention, because this competition for social contracts may lead to tension among the native homeless citizens and may further fuel discriminatory attitudes over refugees.

The ultimate challenge, however, is that the municipalities have to take the responsibility in solving a national level issue, i.e. providing adequate housing for refugees. As far as I am concerned, this challenge cannot be overcome without adopting a holistic approach, where all public sector agencies at various levels, and the private sector housing companies work hand in hand. As I have discussed under research context, a holistic approach would enable overcoming issues such as information gaps and lack of coordination among government agencies. This would facilitate sharing the responsibility of providing adequate housing for refugees, and ensure the successful implementation of the Settlement Act.

### **Need for future research**

Although Malmö was a well-suited case study for this analysis, a comparative study conducted using other major cities in Sweden such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Uppsala would have provided more valuable results. Therefore, I would like to suggest a comparative study on strategies adopted by these cities in housing refugees. At the same time, applicability of successful integration strategies adopted by other European countries could be researched in relation to Sweden's refugee housing issues.

My analysis illustrates that Malmö continues to be a refugee hotspot, despite its housing issues and the efforts made through the Settlement Act in reducing the burden on such cities. Thus, it can be assumed that the issues related to providing adequate housing for refugees, as well as the challenges related to their integration could not be solved only through

resettlement policies, dispersal policies to be exact. In my point of view, there should be appropriate housing policies to work in parallel with refugee settlement policies. Besides, I too believe that Sweden needs a change in policy direction, from the mindset of housing as a commodity to housing as a fundamental human right. In my opinion, there is a need for policy studies in these areas.

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## **Appendix - Interview Guides**

### **Declaration**

I am Asha Sri Nissanka, a postgraduate student at Malmö University. The theme for my Thesis for the Masters in Urban Studies is:

“Beyond a roof and walls: gaps challenges in providing  
adequate housing for refugees in Malmö”

Through this thesis, I attempt to explore how Sweden accommodates refugees and how municipalities, Malmö as a case study, adhere to providing housing for them. I assure that the information from this interview will be used only for the academic purposes, and will not be quoted or used for any other purposes.

### **Guide for Migrationsverket**

1. How does Sweden work with UNHCR in accepting refugees?
2. What is the process of accepting asylum seekers who come by themselves?
3. How does Migrationverket provide accommodation for them before they are allocated to respective municipalities?
4. What are standards followed in arranging these accommodations?
5. What are issues faced by Migrationverket in accommodating asylum seekers?
6. How long does it take to give a decision to asylum seekers?

### **Guide for Länsstyrelsen**

1. What are the responsibilities of Länsstyrelsen in reception and establishment of refugees?
2. How does Länsstyrelsen coordinate with Malmö stad in planning settlement locations for refugees?
3. What are the conditions considered in the resettlement programme?
4. Are there any support from Länsstyrelsen to municipalities in facilitating housing ?
5. What are the issues faced by Länsstyrelsen in fulfilling the responsibilities with regard to refugees ?
6. Are there any other services provided to refugees to facilitate their integration ?

### **Guide for Malmö Stad**

1. Does Malmö stad do any estimation by themselves on how many refugees they Can provide housing in a particular year?
2. How do you negotiate with public housing companies?
3. What are the factors you consider in finding housing for refugees?
4. What are the main areas in Malmö that refugee housing are located in?
5. Do you find any difficulties in implementing the Settlement Act ?
6. What is the municipality's stand with EBO ?
7. Do you provide any information or advisory service for People to find their own housing?
8. What happens if People cannot find housing after 2 years ?
9. Are there any specific civil society organisations supporting refugees in finding housing?
10. Do you conduct any surveys/assessments on the refugees' perceptions on housing provided by Malmö Stad?