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**Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe
Different kinds of risks resulting from various structures and changes in the labour
markets**

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**Asylum-seeking children's welfare, health and well-being.
An outline for research.**

Ulla Björnberg , *University of Göteborg*

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BACKGROUND

Research on refugees has largely neglected analysis of children's situation in the asylum-application process, both from an institutional perspective and in terms of children as participants. Children make up close to 50% of all refugees in the world. Many children have suffered when they arrive into the host country. Many children suffer during the asylumseeking process and their health may deteriorate. The long term effects can be very problematic. The problems of parents are often great and easily obscure the problems and needs of children.

In September 2004 collaborative group¹ arranged a conference in Göteborg, "The Asylum-Seeking Child in Europe".² Experience from the conference demonstrated the importance of analysing children's welfare, health and well-being in a larger context – ranging from international agreements (such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child) to national laws and local applications. Results from the conference show that:

Children can have their own reasons for being granted asylum

¹ The collaborative group for development of research on asylum-seeking children in Europe (Göteborg Research on Asylum-seeking Children in Europe, GRACE) is a multi-scientific forum at Göteborg University and the Nordic School of Public Health.

² The conference was financed by Göteborg University/Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, the Research Council for Working Life and Social Science (FAS), the Swedish Research Council, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Museum of World Culture. <http://www.cergu.gu.se/Asylum.htm>

Practices vary between countries. In many countries there is a culture of misbelief regarding refugees. This is connected to the problem that illegal immigrants, trafficked children and ‘proper’ refugees are mixed up. Further, in the process of developing more tight security policies, human rights may be violated.

It is in this light that the project described here with its multi-scientific approach is to be understood. The project is about to start.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The project’s general aim is to contribute, through systematic and methodical investigations, knowledge about what influences asylum-seeking children’s welfare, health and well-being.

In the study we want to produce knowledge about the local practices of interpreting and applying current international and national policies as well as receiving the child in the asylum process, and about children’s own experiences of the process – primarily in Sweden and subsequently in a number of other European countries.

The main aim is also to highlight foundations for developing good practices in an asylum process that consciously focuses on children as individuals and their own problems during the process, along with children’s right to be heard and to participate as actors with the possibility of influencing their life situation – all in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To improve practices of reception and waiting for outcomes

Regard children as persons in their own right. Make children visible and give them a voice.

Promote the implementation of the convention of the rights of children.

We regard the asylum application as a process in several phases, with a clear beginning – the concrete application for asylum – and a more many-faceted final stage. We emphasise that our analyses are to consider the process itself and take account of the child’s experiences in a longer time perspective. Further, the significance of the local situation will be analysed. In the study we will focus on the transitional process, i.e. the time from when children leave their country until they have either left Sweden or obtained residence permits.

The project is multi-scientific, which means the problems investigated – children’s health and well-being – are given a contextual framework for understanding. The disciplines involved are paediatrics, sociology, social anthropology, political science.

The problems are illuminated on diverse levels. The multi-scientific approach enables analysis of how general structures influence the actors nationally and locally as well as

affecting the children themselves. Asylum policy is by nature largely transnational. On the European Union level, harmonisation of refugee policy is discussed, and such discussions and directions of intent influence national policy. Ultimately they affect, in turn, the local applications of national intentions in terms of policy and its regulations. Finally, these applications provide frameworks for children's scope of action in daily life.

Our model of understanding presupposes, therefore, that the project as a whole is built around analyses of the interplay between different institutional levels:

1. International political statements of intent through agreements and national political documents that express ambitions in regard to asylum-seeking children.
2. Local authorities' interpretations and applications of rules for satisfying children's needs, and their justifications for decisions.
3. Children's own experiences of the asylum process (such as possibilities of being heard, and other scope for action). How do these experiences affect the children's welfare, health and well-being?

The factors that affect asylum-seeking children's health and well-being, then, exist on different levels. Since the project is to be carried out by a multi-scientific research group, preconditions are created for dealing with the described multi-level problems at once internationally, nationally, locally and from the standpoint of children themselves.

THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The project is unified by a number of theoretical approaches which partly coincide. One unifying approach is based upon normative political theory and the discussion that, since the mid-1990s, has unfolded around international or "post-national" citizenship and human rights, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In an influential study from 1994, Yasemin Soysal supports the thesis that recent decades have seen the development of a "post-national membership".³ This means that even when immigrants hold no formal citizenship, they have still come to share many of the rights which traditionally have been reserved for the state's own citizens. To the same group – immigrants without citizenship who have been granted many rights – the Swedish scholar Tomas

³ Soysal, Yasemin Nuhoğlu (1994) *Limits of Citizenship. Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. University of Chicago Press. Although it would be more correct to speak of "post-governmental", we here use the concept "post-national" since it is internationally accepted (see e.g. Delanty, 2000). While the concept of citizenship formally refers to a juridical relationship between an individual and a state, the concept is by tradition strongly associated with the notion that certain individuals within a certain territory belong together – they constitute a nation. Since Sweden has had no large, geographically clearly delimited minority groups, it is perhaps unusually easy for a Swede to have the erroneous impression that a state and a nation are the same thing. Such is not the case, as shown for example by the state of Spain with strong nations such as Catalonia and the Basque Provinces. This confusion of concepts is, however, common also outside Sweden.

Hammar has given a designation that has made an enormous international impact: *denizens*.⁴ Soysal maintains that the extension of rights to non-citizens is difficult to explain because it basically conflicts with the usual notion that formal citizenship implies a clear inclusion of certain individuals and, on the other hand, an equally clear exclusion of others. Her explanation is that this change has resulted from a global development in the perception of human rights. Rights are no longer granted according to national affiliation, but have become more universal.

The discussion of post-national citizenship is rooted in debates about human rights and persons who find themselves in a transitional process. The ideas involving post-national citizenship bear upon precisely what we intend to study – rights for asylum applicants, those without papers, and other types of immigrants. Different categories of immigrants overlap each other, which results in mixing together the handling of asylum applicants with that of illegal immigrants and others. The categorisation is a problem and has a close connection with social rights.

The tension between formal citizenship's requirements of excluding certain individuals and universal human rights' requirements of including everyone, however, becomes particularly evident in regard to asylum-seeking children. Not least, it is clear from a comparison of the Convention's Article 12 on children's right to be heard, and its Article 3 on the primacy of what is best for the child, with the Swedish state's assertions that "the State's responsibility for children who reside illegally in the country can thus be phased out"⁵ and that "the Aliens Act [is] a legislation where the child's interest must be weighed against other social interests".⁶ Hence a recurrent theme in the project is the issue of drawing limits for asylum-seeking children's rights, and what effects this delimitation has on such children's welfare, health and well-being.

The theoretical perspective on citizenship ties together the sub-projects in the full study. These are also intersected by other theoretical perspectives, such as a gender-theoretical framework of understanding.⁷ This is represented in the analysis on all levels. On the level of policy and rule systems, light is thrown on discursive content and on the manner and measure of attention and importance given to children's gender affiliation. On the level of interpersonal interaction, whether gender has significance for children's scope of action and what strategies are coupled to it will be analysed.

⁴ Hammar, Tomas (1990) *Democracy and the Nation State. Aliens, Denizens and Citizens in a World of Internationalized Migration*. Aldershot: Avebury.

⁵ *Strategy for realising in Sweden the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Prop. 1997/98:182, p. 12.

⁶ *Swedish migration policy in global perspective*. Prop. 1996/97:25, p. 246.

⁷ Fenstermaker, Sarah & West, Candace (eds.) (2002) *Doing Gender, Doing Difference*. New York: Routledge.

SUB PROJECTS

Asylum-seeking children in EU countries – comparison between international and national policies

This sub-project investigates whether and, if so, how national legislation has been influenced by international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and EU legislation. Briefly, the investigation can be concretised in three parts: (1) A relatively intensive case study of changes in Sweden regarding the trade-off between, on the one hand, the perceived need to regulate immigration and, on the other hand, the need to serve the child's best interest. (2) A relatively extensive study of the degree to which EU states' national legislation has been affected by international instruments such as the Convention and EU legislation. (3) A part that pervades the first two: why do states, to varying degree, heed international instruments and change their national legislation regarding asylum-seeking children?

The study is conducted on a legislative level and examines the argumentation that has driven the changes in legislation. The Swedish case itself deserves special illumination because, in particular, the past year's discussion of children with a 'devitalization syndrome' has been very confused. Sweden is also an interesting case when compared with other countries, since the issue of asylum-seeking children has largely dominated the refugee-policy debate.

A key question is the degree to which international conventions and EU legislation – henceforth termed international instruments – have led to changes in states' national legislation. This question pervades both the case study of Sweden and the more extensive country-comparative study.

In addition, those two studies are pervaded by what can be considered the sub-project's third part. The issue is why states, to varying degree, heed international instruments and change their national legislation regarding asylum-seeking children. Insights into why states differ with respect to applying international instruments are not only of intrinsic interest, but also have value in designing future international instruments. With greater understanding of why states choose to apply international instruments in different ways, knowledge can also be acquired of *how* these should be designed in order to be applied in a unified manner. If international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child have no impact in some states, their effects on asylum-seeking children's health and well-being, for example, are naturally smaller.

Fundamental in this area is the tension that is perceived to exist between a state's need for regulated immigration and, on the other hand, the Convention's requirement to serve the child's best interest. The sub-project will be concretised in issues where this tension can be expected to have clear manifestations. Such issues were discussed above in regard to the Swedish case study, and the investigation thus concerns, among other things, possible changes

in states' laws for aliens and questions of whether children in hiding should have rights to schooling and medical care.

Should it prove impossible to establish that states' national legislation has been influenced at all – i.e. that differences occur not only in the ways of applying legislation – then it will obviously become relevant to explain why certain states implement the international instruments while others do not.

In regard to the country-comparative study, it is of course necessary to make a selection of EU states. Such a selection calls for some deliberation and is not quite completed at the time of writing.

Children's rights according to Swedish law and application at local levels

Refugee children are ensured, by Swedish regulations and with reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, diverse social rights which are essential for the child's welfare and development. Essential rights are schooling, housing, a trustee, and other social necessities. Satisfaction of the children's needs is verified by the social service and other authorities at municipal level. Hence, it is officials within the municipality who are responsible for learning of children's needs and satisfying these after review and assessment of how they can best be fulfilled. As a step in examining children's experiences of how their rights/needs are dealt with, we intend to study the local regulations that surround assessments and decisions. This will involve scrutiny of relevant documents which underlie the concretisations of needs and rights that are made by officials. It is especially important, however, to study how policies are understood and applied by local officials/administrators. We will therefore conduct interviews with officials who perform reviews and create bases for decisions. Further, we intend to interview decision-makers with responsibility for different sub-areas concerning children's needs. The interviews are to focus partly on one's own organisation, and partly on collaboration with – and/or possible conflicts between – other organisations responsible for satisfying children's needs.⁸

The analysis of the interviews with officials and decision-makers will be carried out with discourse analysis. This method takes account of how perceptions and understandings are constructed in social interplay between actors at different levels within the organisation, but also externally and with clients. The social interplay is analysed in terms of the social structure within the organisation, especially power relations coupled to decision hierarchies and gender relations.⁹ The local rules for application and routines for need assessment are connected with interpretations of political ambitions on more comprehensive levels. Here we

⁸ Schierenbeck, Isabel (2003) *Bakom Vålfärdsstatens Dörrar*, Umeå: Boréa; Grahams, Mark (1999) *Classifications, Persons and Policies. Refugees and Swedish Welfare Bureaucracy*, Stockholm University.

⁹ Löfstrand, Cecilia (2005) *Hemlöshetens Politik. Lokal policy och praktik*, Malmö: Égalité; Thörn, Catharina (2004) *Kvinnans Platser – bilder av hemlöshet*, Malmö: Égalité. See also Michael Herzfeld (1992) *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy*. New York: Berg; Handelman, D. & Leyton, E. (1978) *Bureaucracy and Worldview: Studies in the logic of official interpretation*, St. Johns: Institute of Social and Economic Research.

distinguish between the political ambitions expressed in legal texts and, on the other hand, the perceptions expressed in media and general statements by people with political influence. These create a discursive context for how local interpretations of rules are expressed and given a practical application.¹⁰ In the analyses we will apply an organisation-theoretical approach that is designated *organisation theory of cognitive balance*.¹¹ This approach considers different actors' roles in organisational contexts and their different perceptions and professional ethics. The focus is thus on the cognitive processes which create social order, both within the individual organisation and in its external dependencies. The degree of cognitive balance or imbalance between administrators contributes to organising how problems are perceived, assessments are made, and decisions are reached.

Researchers from other European host countries argue that limitations of the external control over territory in host countries have increased the internal control of asylum applicants and other "irregular migrants" (by restricting mobility and controlling identities). British studies indicate that the extension of social services and other benefits to asylum applicants has also entailed more effective control of these.¹² To what degree does this restrictiveness mark the meeting at the local level in the Swedish host society?

What happens in the field of tension between national policies, local regulations and interpretations, and the child's or family's expressed needs is of special interest in this sub-study. The investigation takes its point of departure in theories of modern bureaucracy and institutional categorisation¹³, as these are applied in the reception of refugees.¹⁴ This means, somewhat simplified, that a client group ("refugees" or "asylum applicants") is defined in unambiguous and standardised categories, which can be assumed to have certain needs and are required to exhibit substantial conformity. Such an institutional order and the power underlying it can thus disregard or distort refugees' own interpretations of their problematic reality.¹⁵

Bureaucratic criteria must be employed in a unified manner. On the other hand they are often in practice open to more informal interpretations that are formed in the meeting with clients, and within the framework of a wider cultural repertoire. For instance, they may be shaped by prevailing discourses about migration (e.g. within a widened concept of security)¹⁶

¹⁰ Douglas (1987) *How institutions think*, London: Routledge; Brekke, Philomena, Frerks, Georg and Schrijvers (2004) *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies. Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books; Goldthorpe, Liz (2004) "Every Child Matters: A legal perspective", *Child Abuse Review* Vol. 13: 115-136.

¹¹ Machado, Nora (1998) *Using the bodies of the dead. Legal, ethical and organisational dimensions of organ transplantation*. Dartmouth: Ashgate.

¹² Morris, L. (1998) "Governing at a Distance: The Elaboration of Controls in British Immigration", *IMR* 32, No. 4, pp. 0949-0973. Watters, C. (2005), in Andersson, H. et al. (op. cit.).

¹³ Foucault, M. (1991) "Governmentality", in Burchell, G. et al. (eds.) *The Foucault Effect*. H. Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 1-51. Herzfeld, M. (1992) *The Production of Indifference: The roots of Western bureaucracy*.

Handelman, D. (1978) "Introduction: A recognition of bureaucracy", in D. Handelman & E. Leyton (eds.), *Bureaucracy and World View: Studies in the logic of official interpretation*. St. Johns: Institute of Social and Economic Research.

¹⁴ Zetter, R. (1991) "The Labelling of Refugees", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1:39-62; Hertzberg, F. (2003) *Gränsrotbyråkrati och normativ svenskhet*, Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.

¹⁵ Eastmond, M. "Reconstituting normal lives, shaping new citizens: Refugee Integration and the Politics of Trauma" (forthcoming).

¹⁶ Abiri, E. (2001) *The Securitisation of Migration. Towards an Understanding of Changes in Migration Policy in the 1990s. The case of Sweden*. Göteborg University: Padrigu.

and negative perceptions of the “client group” (e.g. the deficiency discourses about refugees that have become common in recent decades)¹⁷, or about specific groups and their problems¹⁸, and may thereby further limit asylum applicants’ scope for action. The opposite may also occur where narrow rules are questioned and counteracted, even by individual officials. It is thus equally important, from the standpoint of health, to study local counteracting forces – individual officials, local associations, church, school, and other actors, who promote the asylum applicants’ scope for action, self-willed power, and well-being.

For the purpose of placing the asylum-seeking children in the centre and rendering them visible, one subsidiary aim is to illuminate children’s experiences of everyday life during the transitional period. How does the dialogue between persons in authority and children occur – is it a top-down perspective, or do the children experience that they are listened to? Do children experience that they have been listened to during the asylum examination? The contradiction between internal logic/rationality within the organisation and satisfying children’s needs on the basis of their articulated needs will be brought to attention here.

Children’s welfare, health and well-being

Knowledge about refugee children’s health in Sweden is relatively limited. The reports that exist, however, strongly indicate that they are a vulnerable group with extremely impaired health in comparison to children born in Sweden.¹⁹ Asylum-seeking children’s physical and mental health is influenced by many factors both before and during migration, during the asylum process, and afterwards in the process of integration or return migration. The factors operate on several levels: experience of stress such as organised violence and departure, of social support – primarily from the family and possibly people who stay behind, or new social networks – and of a wider social context where both the social situation in exile, including the asylum process, and the political situation in the homeland have significance.²⁰

Regulations as well as practice in the handling of asylum are important for the children’s health. These circumstances also influence family-structure conditions, such as the parents’ and siblings’ physical and mental health, which are perhaps the most crucial determinants of health in asylum-seeking children.²¹

¹⁷ Eastmond, M. (forthcoming); Carlson, M. (2003) *Svenska för invandrare: Brygga eller Gräns?* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

¹⁸ Hertzberg (op. cit.), Graham, M. (1999) *Classifications, Persons and Policies: Refugees and Swedish Welfare Bureaucracy, Diss., Stockholm: Studies in Social Anthropology. Schierenbeck, I. (2003) Bakom välfärdstatens dörrar, Umeå: Boréa.*

¹⁹ Hjern, A. (1998) *Migration till segregation – en folkhälsorapport om barn med utländskt ursprung i Stockholm.* Stockholm: Centrum för Barn och Ungdomshälsa, Samhällsmedicin Syd, Stockholms läns landsting, Report No. 1998:1. Hjern Anders (2005) “Refugee children’s long-term adaptation in Sweden; general outcomes and prognostic factors”, in Andersson, Hans, Ascher, Henry, Björnberg, Ulla, Eastmond, Marita, Mellander, Lotta (eds.) *The Asylum-seeking Child in Europe.* Göteborg: Centre for European Research at Göteborg University (CERGU), pp. 127-33.

²⁰ Hjern, Anders & Jeppsson, O. (2005) “Mental health care for refugee children in exile. Rethinking the care of refugees and displaced persons”, in Ingleby, D. (ed.) *Forced migration and mental health,* New York: Springer, pp. 115-28.

²¹ Ascher, Henry (2005) “Rapes in war: effects on mother-child relations”, in Andersson, H., Ascher, H., Björnberg, U., Eastmond, M., Mellander, L. (eds.) *The Asylum-seeking Child in Europe,* Göteborg: Centre for European Research at Göteborg University (CERGU), pp. 101-11.

During recent years, ever greater interest has been directed towards a health-promoting perspective on health and illness – that is, towards investigating factors which protect and have safeguarding effects for individuals also if they are exposed to potentially traumatising factors or other risks to physical and mental health. Antonovsky’s research on these factors has constituted a paradigm shift²² from a one-sided focus on trauma, and can be summarised as a focus on the importance of “a sense of coherence” for health and well-being. Key components for acquiring a feeling of coherence are the senses that life is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. A supportive environment contributes to greater “resilience” in the individual, which in turn contributes to improved capacity for “coping” or mastering of stresses. A third important health-promoting factor is the possibility of “empowerment”, or being able to influence one’s situation.²³

Studies of the asylum process in terms of this new knowledge about health-promoting processes and factors have never been made, as far as we are aware.

Within the framework for the expanding research on childhood, there are studies dealing with migration and ethnicity with a focus on children and young people. Very few studies, however, have specifically addressed the special theoretical and empirical problems that the asylum application – or, as we choose to call it, the transitional process – entails for children’s health and well-being.

Asylum applicants enter a transitional process that can be described theoretically with the concept of liminality, a social state or phase in which one’s position and identity are unclear, and which is characterised by great ambiguity.²⁴ This has begun already in one’s homeland, when the decision to emigrate was taken and preparations were started. Often there are traumatic experiences with physical and psychological violence in the background, but one may also feel subjected to an exclusion process in the homeland with civil and economic rights being reduced to a minimum. The transitional process is marked both by such exclusionary experiences in the homeland, and by expectations about the rights which one perceives that the host country may offer. These perceptions may have been based upon knowledge of international agreements regarding human rights, not least the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The encounter with local conditions in the host country may risk aggravating the effects of the negative experiences that one brings.²⁵ This has been especially demonstrated by, for example, the situation of refugee children with severe devitalization problems in Sweden. The tension between exclusionary experiences and expectations of improvement in the situation after migration constitutes a framework for how strategies of dealing with one’s life must be studied, together with the significance of the residence time and the children’s ages.

²² Antonovsky, A. (1991) *Hälsans mysterium*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

²³ Berg Kelly, K. (1998) *Ungdomsmedicin*. Stockholm: Liber.

²⁴ Turner, V. (1995) “Betwixt and Between: On liminality and ambiguity”, in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine.

²⁵ Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg (1998); Silove (1993, 1998).

Studies of the transitional process show that local institutional contexts have a decisive importance for the individuals' mental well-being. This is related partly to what resources the individuals have at their disposal, with which they can guide and control their life situation – in short, to the individuals' scope for action.

Research on children's situation during the transitional process reveals that they play a very active and central role for the family as a whole. A German study²⁶ provides insight into the problems experienced by children and parents during the period of waiting for a decision on whether they can stay in Germany and can begin to plan for the future. The children are a spearhead for the family's establishment in the host country, since the children are quicker than the parents to learn the language because they can go to school. Thus, the children are an essential resource in the family for making contact with resources that enable other family members to become adjusted. This means that the children must shoulder an adult responsibility which can affect their own situation negatively. A further impediment is that they must deal with difficulties in being seen and accepted within their social environment. However, according to these studies, it is a pervasive characteristic of the transitional process that the children are met as outsiders by the environment's attitudes, particularly when trying to establish comradely relations in school and in the neighbourhood. At school they have trouble in gaining comrades, since they speak the language badly and since others do not know whether they will stay. From the teachers they hide the fact that they do not keep up with the schoolwork, because they do not want to be treated specially or be considered less talented. Most of the interviewed children in the German study lived in refugee camps, and their social world was developed there in interplay with the other refugee children.

Contrary examples also occur in Sweden, notably where residence has not entailed isolation from society. For instance, the media have pointed out that asylum-seeking children have also been integrated and given support, which is manifested not least by comrades, schools and sports associations when they are deported. The German study refers to other areas where the situation in the family was troublesome for children, and takes up changes in roles and responsibility which we recognise from separate studies of refugee families.²⁷ On the one hand, the children became the family's link to the surrounding society, and thereby acquired an authority that "competed" with the father's "normal" authority. The children developed into autonomous individuals with an adult-like relationship to the host country's institutions. This development conflicted with their becoming adults as conveyed by the family through its traditions and possible desire to return to the homeland if feasible. Similar results have emerged from an English study²⁸ On the other hand, being a refugee means that

²⁶ Anderson, P. (2001) "'You don't belong here in Germany...'" On the social situation of refugee children in Germany", *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 14: 187-199.

²⁷ Nyberg, E. (2003) "Familjen med flyktingbakgrund", in M. Bäck-Wiklund & T Johansson (eds.) *Nätverksfamiljen*, Stockholm: Natur & Kultur. Eastmond, M. (1996) "*Luchar y Sufrir* – Stories of Life and Exile", *Ethnos* 3-4. Eastmond, M. (1998) "Nationalist discourses and the Construction of Difference: Bosnian refugees in Sweden", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11(2): 161-82.

²⁸ Candappa, M. (2001) "The right to education and an adequate standard of living: Refugee children in the UK" in *The international Journal of Children's Rights* 8: 261-270

traditional patterns of life are reassessed. Women and young people welcome changes that free them from previously subordinating relationships.²⁹

The parents often place high expectations on the children and their future. Moreover, the parents have mixed feelings of guilt about the children, over having brought them into a situation where their future may be very uncertain. In the family, therefore, the children find themselves in a situation that contains several elements of tension and ambivalence which they must handle. To the extent that the children have their own traumatic experiences to cope with, the situation is further complicated.

Despite the central role that the children play from the parents' standpoint during the transitional period, it is commonly observed that children are not allowed to speak for themselves to the environment and be heard as such. There are numerous documented research results showing deficiencies in children's right to be heard in, for example, the process of applying for asylum.³⁰

In a framework of theoretical sociology for analysis of children's well-being, we take account of power and scope for action. The analysis of power has two dimensions. One emphasises power as a relationship of authority over somebody who can thus be made to act against his/her will. The other dimension views power as ability to control one's own situation.³¹ Every power relation contains elements of counter-power: a person who is made to act against his/her will tries to find ways of counteracting the degree of control. These may involve concrete actions, but also handling feelings of subordination and violation of personal integrity, which can be a consequence of power exerted against the child or can be the power exercise itself with intent to violate, for example in connection with physical or psychological violence.³²

Power and counter-power are exercised within the framework of diverse social contexts, which in themselves are marked by specific power structures: the family, school, social network, relations with officials. In these social contexts, children are subordinate by definition, since they are minors by age. As asylum applicants, they lack rights that are conferred by citizenship or permanent residence. Yet as children, they possess rights which are granted by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and which hold for all children regardless of national citizenship. Both as children and as asylum applicants, children are in a

²⁹ Essed, Ph., Frerks, G. & Schrijvers, J. (2004) "Introduction: Refugees, Agency and Social Transformation", in Essed, Ph., Frerks, G. & Schrijvers, J. (eds.) *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies. Agency, Policies, Thics and Politics*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

³⁰ Finch, Nadine (2005) "Seeking asylum alone", pp. 57-66; Halvorsen, Kate (2005) "Decisions on Separated children who apply for asylum", pp. 67-72; Nilsson, Eva (2005) "A child perspective in the Swedish Asylum process: Rethoric and practice", pp. 73-90 – all in Andersson, Hans E., Henry Ascher, Ulla Björnberg, Marita Eastmond & Lotta Mellander (eds.) *The Asylum-seeking Child in Europe*. Göteborgs Universitet: Centrum för Europaforskning; Goldthorpe, Liz (2004) "Every Child Matters: A legal perspective", *Child Abuse Review* Vol. 13: 115-136; Bilson, Andy & White, Sue (2005) "Representing children's views and best interests in court: An international comparison", *Child Abuse Review* Vol. 14: 220-239.

³¹ For a more thorough discussion of these power dimensions, see Björnberg, Ulla & Kollind, Anna-Karin (2003) *Att leva själv tillsammans*. Malmö: Liber.

³² Weinehall, Katarina (2005) "Take my father away from home": Children growing up in the proximity of violence", in Eriksson, Maria, Hester, Marianne, Keskinen, Suvi & Pringle, Keith (eds.) *Tackling Men's Violence in Families*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

position of dependence on those who distribute resources to them. The dependence is an important part of the power relationship, and influences the children's possibilities of choice when it comes to strategies for dealing with their life situations. Extensive international research points to dependence and learned helplessness as a consequence of refugeeship and of decreased scope for action, and to its negative effects on self-reliance and well-being.³³

Scope for action is assumed to be formed and negotiated also in the meeting of official authorities and welfare institutions at local level with the asylum-seeking child. The local authorities have to implement national policies and municipal regulations when receiving refugees, on the basis of an internal rationality as a bureaucratic organisation – while at the same time they are to satisfy the child's needs as articulated by the child itself. Here is a tension that builds upon conflicting requirements in terms of so-called organisational incongruence.³⁴

Changes in the children's social world are investigated with a narrative method, through accounts by children and other family members.³⁵ In these, one can also study how the narrators, individually and together, try to create contexts and meaning in the changes that they experience, and seek to formulate strategies for the future. It is presupposed that one has a child-centred approach, allowing the children to define uncertainty or support in the context.³⁶ Thus, qualitative interviews are to be conducted with children and parents.

The approach comprises a cultural and structural, as well as interpersonal, perspective on children's social worlds – especially the children's roles in relation to parents – and on perceptions of children's abilities and the normal limits of scope for action. These may be culturally distinctive in different families, but in all cases the norms must be stretched and re-negotiated within the new context of asylum applicants. Here are changes that, in an already uncertain situation, create insecurity which can be expected to affect health and well-being.³⁷ What is considered healthy and “normal” for a child, and how ill health is expressed and dealt with, may also vary and be included in the analysis.

The sub-studies covered by this heading will aim at illuminating:

1. How children are heard during the asylum examination. How they experience that they have been heard also in connection with need assessment. How the

³³ Harrell-Bond, B. (1986) *Imposing Aid. Emergency assistance to refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁴ Machado, Nora (1998) *Using the bodies of the dead. Legal, ethical and organisational dimensions of organ transplantation*. Dartmouth: Ashgate.

³⁵ Eastmond, M. (1996) “*Sufrir y Luchar – Stories of life and exile*”, *Ethnos* 61:3-4. Eastmond, M. (2000) “Refugees and Health: Ethnographic approaches”, in Ahearn, F. (ed.) *The Psychosocial Wellness of Refugees*, Oxford: Berghahn. Engel, Susanne (2005) “Narrative analysis of children's experience”, in Greene, Sheil & Hogan, Diane (eds.) *Researching Children's Experience. Approaches and Methods*, London: Sage.

³⁶ MacMullin & Loughry (2000) “A child-centered approach to investigating refugee children's concerns”, in Ahearn Jr., F. (ed.) *Psycho-Social Wellness of Refugees*, Oxford: Berghahn Books. Eastmond, M. (2000) “Refugees and Health: Ethnographic Approaches”, in Ahearn Jr., F. (op. cit.).

³⁷ Antonovsky, Aaron (1991), *Hälsans mysterium*, Stockholm: Natur och Kultur; Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and society in the late modern age*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Jackson, M. (1996) *Things as They Are: New directions in phenomenological anthropology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

dialogue occurs between persons in authority and children. This sub-project takes up language – choice of words, linguistic actions in a broad perspective, listening etc.

2. Children's experiences in everyday life, based on the following areas:
 - Experience of housing and housing history
 - experience of linguistic knowledge and language understanding
 - comrades in school
 - their role in the family
 - social contacts in the vicinity
 - contacts with relatives
 - unaccompanied children's specific situation
3. The child's contacts with its homeland
4. Interview study of children's self-image and sense of coherence
5. Investigation of growth, development, and bodily health
6. Register study of health data for refugee children in Sweden.

Trafficking of children

The difficulty of creating reliable statistics on trafficking highlights weaknesses in the routines for handling unaccompanied children, and the deficient coordination of mechanisms for registration and surveillance between different member countries. How European countries perceive trafficking, how children who have – or are suspected of having – been trafficked are received, and what treatment they are given, can therefore also vary between countries.

Children in exposed situations, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, under-aged immigrants or children who have demonstrably been subjected to trafficking, are often at risk of their specific problems being hidden away in the statistics.³⁸ Children are seldom made visible as simply children, which is a pervasive tendency in documentation of migration flows as well as, for example, of prostitution in different European countries. Thus, children risk becoming invisible and, instead, being understood in general terms on the basis of how society views, for instance, asylum applicants, illegal immigrants or prostitutes.³⁹

³⁸ See e.g. Andersson, Hans E., Henry Ascher, Ulla Björnberg, Marita Eastmond and Lotta Mellander (eds.) (2005) *The Asylum-seeking Child in Europe* (205 pp.), Göteborgs universitet: Centrum för Europaforskning.

³⁹ See also *ibid.* and IOM (2001: 221ff.) *Trafficking in Unaccompanied Minors for Sexual Exploitation in the European Union. Pilot Project on the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings – Research and Networking on Unaccompanied Minors in the European Union STOP Programme 2000.* International Organization for Migration: (<http://www.iom.int>) (2005-05-18: http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/Trafficking_minors_partI.pdf and http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/Trafficking_minors_partII.pdf)

The problem of creating reliable statistics on trafficking also reflects an underlying problem with producing dependable statistics and documentation of so-called irregular migration as a whole.⁴⁰ Trafficking occurs in the “shade” – beyond the state’s reach and control – so that knowledge about trade in human beings is often speculative and uncertain. Parallel with this invisibility, the *phenomenon* of trafficking has had a great impact on the political debate about migration and refugees in general.⁴¹

At both the EU and national levels, trafficking is an important area of policy work, connected with the police and judicial collaboration, visa rights and customs activities, the work for human rights and against sexual exploitation, versus the combating of “organised criminality” and irregular migration.⁴²

Analysis of such policy can therefore provide a good background for determining what the different European countries understand and perceive as *trafficking*. When studying policy in a *perspective of children* – or with a human rights approach focused on children – it can be of interest to examine both contrasts and similarities in these countries’ ways of dealing with cases of trafficking where children suffer.

A tripartite design for research may prove fruitful for such a study: (1) Extensive and comparative analysis of policies from different European countries can bring into focus similarities and differences *between* national policies related to trafficking. (2) This analysis can be further deepened by studying supranational legislation at EU level and international policy in regard to trafficking – from the UN, UNICEF, IOM – in order to capture contrasts between the national plans for action and (superordinate) international guidelines. (3) Discourse analysis can be a useful tool for clarifying distinctive national and supranational ways of speaking about and understanding the trafficking of children.

Problems to be studied in an analysis of such national and supranational policy:

- How is “trafficking” dealt with in national as well as international policy?
- How is “trafficking” understood in relation to global criminality, illegal or irregular immigration, prostitution and forced labour?
- Which individuals are regarded as especially vulnerable (“victims”) in connection with being exposed to trafficking, and who are perceived as possible abusers?
- What help and protection can “victims” of trafficking obtain?

⁴⁰ International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2005) *2004 Year Book on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe – A Survey and Analysis of Border Management and Border Apprehension Data from 22 States*. Vienna: ICMPD.

⁴¹ See *ibid.* for parallel discursion.

⁴² *Stop* and *Stop 2* (2001-2002) were the commission’s earlier programmes for combating child sex trade. For the period 2003-2007, *Stop* is incorporated in *Agis*, a programme for coordination and experience exchange between police and judicial authorities. *Daphne* 1 and 2 (2004-2008) is a prevention programme directed explicitly against abuse and violence toward women and children. (See www.eu.int/comm/justice_home for further descriptions of the different programmes.)

- What preventive work is undertaken?
- How are *gender*, *ethnicity* and *age* taken into account by policy on trafficking?

The study is to focus on four national contexts – for example Great Britain, Sweden, Spain and Poland – where each country represents different traditions regarding citizenship and welfare in Europe. This part of the study will emphasise, through conversational interviews with administrators in the migration ministries and police services, illuminating how these officials *understand*, *interpret* and *relate to* policy on trafficking in daily applications and in encounters with children. The results will also be interpreted through discourse analysis and placed in the context of the study on general trafficking policy at both the national and supranational levels.

With the children’s perspective in focus, relevant contributions to further discussion and understanding of minors’ exposure in the *migration process* and in relation to *citizenship* can be highlighted. In this context, “trafficking” becomes a case study and an angle of approach for understanding citizenship as well as *irregular migration* at a macro level, and how such concepts make their impact in everyday life.

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