



**NOVAMIGRA**

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE  
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

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## Brain Storming Sessions Sweden

# On Value Transmission and Value Transformation in the Integration Process

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**In the aftermath of the large inflow of asylum seekers in 2015, questions pertaining to values and norms in Swedish integration work have become more salient. Many integration providers experience an increased importance to communicate and convey norms and values in their daily work. This development, however, leaves many integration providers with question marks on how to best communicate, transmit, or argue for certain values and norms. This policy research alert spells out some of the recent developments and highlights a number of areas of integration to improve.**

What is the role of norms and values in the integration process of immigrants and refugees and in wider societal integration in Sweden? And: which norms and values are deemed central in this regard? What are the dilemmas or conflicts experienced by integration providers, and how do they deal with them? And finally, how has the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’ impacted on the value work that integration providers conduct? The values one adheres to can be seen as an expression of one’s identity. At the same time, those values (often) provide the motivation for one’s actions. In many contexts, values are the driving forces of civil society action and advocacy. People engaging with refugees on the ground are motivated by different values, which might be e.g. national, European, liberal or religious in character. These issues deserve policy attention – not at least in the field of integration –, as well as further academic examination.

Based on three different expert discussions,<sup>1</sup> a contextual desk study (April 2018-March 2019) and relevant academic literature, this policy research alert highlights some of the main topical issues in the field of integration. After a short spotlight on current practices, value expressions and dilemmas encountered, the alert turns briefly to highlight the changes experienced since the large inflow of asylum seekers in 2015, before it ends with six recommendations; three for policy makers and practitioners and four for specific directions in research initiatives (including funding).

## **Values in integration: Where we are and the road ahead**

Questions related to the values and norms of living together have become a very topical issue in most experts’ professional lives, both for value-conveying institutions (like governmental institutions) and value-driven organisations (civil society organisations). Because values are more highlighted in political and everyday debates than before, both types of agents experience a need to be more well versed in discussing, conveying and enforcing values and norms within their organisations and in communicating them towards their respective target groups (such as newly arrived refugees and immigrants, school pupils, members of sport clubs and leisure clubs, to name a few).

The most central values conveyed are everybody’s equal worth and gender equality. But also the prohibition of children’s corporal punishment is mentioned as an often discussed principle. All experts also stated that they convey everybody’s individual rights and obligations as stipulated in Swedish national legislation. Other values included grace of charity (as a specific form of humanitarianism) and inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> A presentation of the discussions and the participating experts can be found in ‘sources’ on page 7.

Most experts from the public sector referred to Swedish national legislation as the most important source of their values, including the school law guiding educational curricula from pre-school to adult education. Also, the human rights system was mentioned often. Others included the Olympic values, Christian values as spelled out in the Bible or Islam as a value-bearing institution.

Communication and concrete action (as in being a role model and acting according to the organisation's beliefs and values) were named as two of the most important means of conveying values.

### **General challenges in the field of value-based integration and inclusion**

One point of discussion was the level of detail in the work guidelines on what is 'right/wrong' to do. Some experts inquired for more detailed guidance for situations of value clashes on sensitive matters, while others were adamant about handling these issues on a personal and case-to-case basis. In general, many agreed that there is a need to increase their employees', members' and volunteers' understanding of values and norms in society. Consequently, many felt the need to arrange additional educational activities for their own employees, members or volunteers, also to learn how to deal with a new way of argumentation in which questions of norms and values are more explicit.

Another point of reflection was the realisation that many of the identified core Swedish values (for example, everybody's equal value and gender equality) put forward in educational activities can easily amount to an ideal image of Swedish society, which may not live up to reality (especially not for people experiencing racism and discrimination). The conveying of 'ideal images' also runs the danger of producing sentiments of rejection towards the values one wants to transmit (Abdullah 2017).

Finally, many stressed the centrality of trust-based social encounters to understand and eventually genuinely embrace shared values. It was stressed that values are often tightly connected to emotions, so that simply being taught about values top-down is not enough for embracing them. It is noted, however, that trust-based social encounters need time to develop - and an improved level of the Swedish language.

### **Specific challenges originating from the 2015 arrivals of asylum seekers**

During 2015, almost 163,000 registrations for asylum were made, which was more than five times as many as during previous years (EMN 2016). The average processing time for asylum applications in 2016 was 328 days, which meant that the consequences of the 2015 arrivals were also felt in the years after (EMN 2016). In 2016, the highest number of first time residence permits was issued, to more than 150,000 persons (for protection reasons, family reunification and family formation, labour immigration, and studies). This represents an increase by 32 percent compared to 2015, when 114,471 individuals received a first-time residence permit in Sweden. Some of the specific challenges experienced as a result of this situation were the following:

Some of the civil society organisations that thrive from a large number of volunteers experienced how some of their volunteers' principal values (for example, the principle of social equality) became insta-

ble under pressure. During the height and in the aftermath of the large-scale refugee arrivals of autumn 2015, they experienced challenging situations and many difficult value-based discussions with both members and asylum seekers. Many of these discussions were based on negative stereotypical images as well as over the question of deservingness and inclusion.

As a consequence of the prolonged time for handling asylum claims, it takes much longer now for a person to get into contact with official integration providers. As a result of that, many individuals start their language and integration courses late. Meanwhile, they receive information about Swedish society and values from non-official sources, in many cases from co-nationals. Often, the experts deemed, this information was wrong and hard to correct – both in terms of the facts it conveyed and in terms of the images of Swedish society it projected above all on family values and gender roles. Therefore, the experts deemed the early integration measures (*tidiga insatser*) introduced since 2015 in many places, specifically the availability of language training and civil orientation during the asylum period as a valuable measure to prevent misconceptions about Swedish society.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The invited participants from 13 different institutions and organisations on local, regional and national level confirmed that the question of values and norms in integration work has become more important since 2015. Many not only refer to an increased use of ‘value-language’ at government level, but also attest values and norms to be an issue in their daily work with immigrant integration and inclusion. However, this value terminology is recent in Swedish political and public discourse, and hence, many expressed a certain insecurity when dealing with situations in which values and norms are discussed. This policy alert closes with seven recommendations to go further about this topic. Three of them address policymakers and practitioners directly, while four are alerts for future research initiatives (including funding).

### Recommendations for policy makers and practitioners

#### 1. Increase early integration measures and/or shorten asylum application procedures

It is deemed important to learn about Swedish norms and values through state or civil society institutions and to be exposed to them right way from start, otherwise immigrants often get wrong information. This is important with regard to information given to asylum seekers and with regard to the processing time of their asylum application.

#### 2. Provide or support spaces of encounter

Encounters with Swedish society are deemed necessary for immigrants to gain a personal and experience-based understanding of the most important values in Swedish society, and to eventually embrace them. Experts deem opportunities to meet and socialize with Swedes as crucial in this respect.

### 3. Make evidence-based policies and practices

There is a need to work closely together with the academic sector in drafting policies and outlining practices. Policies and practices should be based on research-based evidence in order to reach the goal intended (see also Schlierkamp and Gördemann 2019; Ruhs et al. 2019).

## Recommendations for initiating and funding of further research

The experts and the academic literature identify a number of research gaps, which should be filled to better inform policy decision making. These gaps include the process of value transmission, the education of value agents, the process of value transformation as well as the aspect of time in community building (integration).

### 4. Fund research to further study value transmission, specifically in immigrant integration courses

Specifically, future research should focus on how to go from conveying values to embracing values. There is a need to study forms of value transmission that refrain from conveying unattainable ideal images. The rationale is to avoid disappointment and feelings of failure which can result in a refusal to embrace values.

### 5. Fund research to further study how to best support value agents to convey values and norms

Specifically, future research studies should come up with support material on how to deal with conflicts or dilemmas surrounding the transmission of values. Some experts required the need for more guidelines on how to deal with such situations, while others preferred more case-by-case solutions. Some value agents, for example, mentioned situations in which clashing values between course content and the student's individual perspectives created conflicts. Irrespective of which strategy is deemed preferable, value agents should be better versed in discussions and reflections around values and norms. Research should play a vital role in providing both empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

### 6. Fund research on individual value transformation processes

Some schools of social sciences argue that values are transmitted through socialisation, and therefore difficult to change at adult age. Others see possibilities for value transformation to some limited extent. However, studies that inquire into this issue with a specific focus on migrants' perspectives are rare (recent examples are Norris & Puranen 2019; Puranen 2019). Future research should strengthen our understanding of value transformation at adult age, and answer the question to what extent and under which circumstances individual values can alter at adult age.



#### 7. Fund research on time and temporality in the integration process

Research on time in processes of integration and community building has been rare. Nevertheless, both the few existing studies (Bastian 2011; Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013) and the brainstorming session experts' experiences point at the need for individuals to spend time together in order to engender feelings of belonging. This is a crucial yet under-explored aspect of the integration process. There is thus a clear need to allocate resources to allow for research to study how time is invoked in the production and maintenance of communities.

## Sources

### Expert meetings

A sequence of three meetings took place under the heading of a NOVAMIGRA Brain Storming Session on the role of values and norms in the integration process in December 2018 and January 2019. The purpose of all sessions was to discuss the highly topical, but also widely contested subject of the role of values and norms in the integration process of refugees and migrants but also the wider society in general, and to extract relevant issues of specific importance. In all three discussions Chatham House Rules applied. Under these rules, information gathered has to be disconnected from the speaker to ensure anonymity. The purpose of these rules is to ensure a discussion as open and informal as possible.

The first discussion meeting was organised on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at Malmö University, in collaboration with the project PUMOMIG (Public opinion, mobilisations and policies concerning asylum seekers and refugees in anti-immigrants times), financed by BRAIN-be (Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks). The second discussion took place on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018 during the Växjödagarna (organised by Region Kronoberg), a two-day conference gathering Swedish practitioners (and a few researchers) in the field of migration and integration. Finally, the third discussion took place in a brainstorming session at Malmö University on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019, bringing together expert representatives from the Swedish public and civil society, all of them either working with immigrant/refugee integration or wider societal integration. The session was organised in collaboration with researchers from the EU financed project NIEM. Migration scholars from Malmö University participated in the discussion. The participating experts were representatives from the Swedish language education (SFI), the Swedish Migration Agency, from 'folk adult education', UNHCR, different municipalities and the MILSA Civil Orientation education platform, as well as the National Sports Board, the Swedish Church, a study association, an organization of and for unaccompanied minors (*Ensamkommandes förbund*), the Red Cross, Malmö University, and Aleris, a private company that provides accommodation and care for unaccompanied minors. In total, 20 representatives participated.

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## About NOVAMIGRA

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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