



SWEDEN RESEARCH

ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SWEDEN

Thoughts, plans and feelings

Results from a study were 456 people that have applied for asylum in Sweden have been interviewed from November 2015 through May 2016

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SUMMARY	3
BASIC INFO ABOUT THE STUDY	6
A VERY SHORT NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF RESEARCH	7
THE CHOICE OF SWEDEN	8
WHERE TO LIVE IN THE FUTURE	14
WORK AND STUDIES	20
HEALTH AND FAMILY	26
THE STUDY'S METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	32

SUMMARY

The study that has been conducted using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This report accounts for the results from interviews with 456 respondents that have applied for asylum in Sweden. In addition to the interviews, the majority of the respondents filled out a written questionnaire. The charts in the report are results from these, while the text reviews primarily the interviews, combined with the results from the questionnaire.

The study was conducted from November 2015 through May 2016.

THE CHOICE OF SWEDEN

- ✓ The main reasons that the asylum seekers stated for choosing to come to Sweden, is that this country has been at peace for a long time, and that it is a good country for children to grow up in.
- ✓ The respondents least stated reason to choose Sweden (around 6 %) is due to the country's generous economic subsidy to refugees.
- ✓ Most respondents are not aware of which the economic subsidy functions for those with a residence permit are.
- ✓ Every fourth respondent believes that their expectations in Sweden have been exceeded, and as many believe they have not been fulfilled.
- ✓ 95 % in the study state that they plan on remaining in Sweden once they obtain their residence permit.
- ✓ There exists a concern about not getting the residence permit, this being seen as the assurance of safety and security.
- ✓ Experiences of warm welcoming, especially initially, mixed with more dull experiences of not being welcomed in Sweden.
- ✓ When asked to grade the democracy in Sweden, four out of ten give it the highest mark, and one out of ten grade it as non-sufficient.

WHERE TO LIVE IN THE FUTURE

- ✓ Half of the respondents want to continue living where they are now, and half want to move to another part of Sweden whenever they get an opportunity.
- ✓ The treatment received by locals and management at the asylum accommodation seems to play a central role for this inclination.
- ✓ The respondents state that access to jobs is the most important thing about their future neighborhood.
- ✓ They also state that the least important thing about their future neighborhood is the environment, what the neighborhood looks like, and whether there are other inhabitants that share the same origins as themselves.
- ✓ Two thirds of the respondents feel that they are able to access the Swedish community as well as Swedish social contexts.
- ✓ Every fifth respondent claims that they have been exposed to racism from staff at the asylum accommodations and other public institutions, or civilians in Sweden.
- ✓ The asylum seekers state that they have gotten the best reception from the staff at the Swedish Migration Agency and at their children's school.
- ✓ They also state that they have received the worst treatment from the staff at the asylum accommodation and the public employment office, which in Sweden also is responsible for introduction services.

WORK AND STUDIES

- ✓ Seven percent of the respondents are employed.
- ✓ Three out of four have started to plan for how to find a job once they receive their residence permit.
- ✓ Three out of four want to complete their studies or continue studying more in Sweden.
- ✓ One out of four believe that their current education will be enough to find employment.
- ✓ With a few exceptions, all respondents believe that learning Swedish is crucial for their possibilities to get a job. This includes people who speak English.

- ✓ The respondents are open to take any job, regardless of it corresponding to their competence or education.
- ✓ Still, most of the respondents feel that it is important to be able to have a job that corresponds with their skills further on.
- ✓ A recurring testimony is that they are approached by employers at the black market, often being offered jobs at restaurants and cleaning services.
- ✓ Of those who have children in schools, 4 out of 5 are content with their children's schooling.

HEALTH AND FAMILY

- ✓ Every other asylum seeker have had problems with their physical health. In turn, every other of these have received treatment for their conditions.
- ✓ Every third respondent wants to see a psychologist, but no one gets the opportunity.
- ✓ Recurrent themes causing weariness and malaise are created by loneliness, being far away from their family members, worries about these and their situation in the country of origin, pressure at the asylum accommodation and worries about their future in Sweden, often a general concern about the upcoming decision on their asylum application, and often with added concern as the waiting time gets prolonged.
- ✓ Every third respondent have left family in their home country, and plan on reuniting with them in the future. These want to take along, on average, 1.5 adults and 1.5 children per person to Sweden.

BASIC INFO ABOUT THE STUDY

The respondents come from amongst other places Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, and Libya. The interviews have been conducted in the Swedish municipalities of Orust, Mora, Eskilstuna, Nacka, Knivsta, Huddinge, Stockholm, Österåker, Svalöv, Trelleborg, Oskarshamn, Haparanda, Kiruna, Jokkmokk, Gällivare, and Vindeln.

Amongst those who have stated gender in the survey 26 percent are women and 74 percent men. Thirteen of the respondents have gotten a so called municipality placement. These respondents had, as such, obtained their residence permit previous to being interviewed. Otherwise the interviews have been conducted with people living in an asylum accommodation of some sort, waiting for the decision from the Migration board on their requested residence permit.

The study consists of interviews in focus groups with 456 respondents that have applied for asylum in Sweden. Out of these, 319 people completed a written survey, before starting the interviews. The charts display results from the written questionnaire, while the text blocks and quotations are from the interviews. You can read more about the study's methodological and ethical considerations in the final chapter of the report.

A VERY SHORT NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF RESEARCH

We started conducting this study when we noticed that everyone was talking about asylum seekers, but no one was talking with them. If ordinary people without obligations do, then there is nothing to complain about. But when officials with responsibilities for the reception and introduction of asylum seekers did, then it seemed like a problem to us. Developing methods, structures and activities for the asylum seekers requires better knowledge about how they perceive their situation now and in the future. So we started off, without anyone asking us to. Here we present the results, without further analysis. We think they are pretty clear and enough for anyone working with or for asylum seekers to substantiate their ideas on how to do it in the best way.

Carlos Rojas

Sweden Research

THE CHOICE OF SWEDEN

The reputation of Sweden as a peaceful country is the key point for choosing Sweden as a new home country. The respondents expressed knowledge and appreciation for the neutral political stands, the freedom and the democracy in Sweden. Some of them considered also the benefits of the good education for teens and children, expressing that Sweden is a good country to raise children. Allegations to the reputation of Swedish people as friendly towards refugees, also played a role for some of the respondents. In the written questionnaire the least chosen reason for coming to Sweden was the existence of financial subsidies for refugees. More alleged was that the legislative system in Sweden regarding refugees' opportunities to stay was generous.

During the interviews, asylum seekers with different backgrounds expressed their concerns about the future of living in Sweden, still unaware of their chances of receiving permanent residence permit; They are looking forward to starting their new life in Sweden and see the residence permit as the assurance of their safety and security.

“I wanted to go as far as possible from the Middle East and war, we lost everything in Syria. I am searching for a peaceful life for me and my family.”

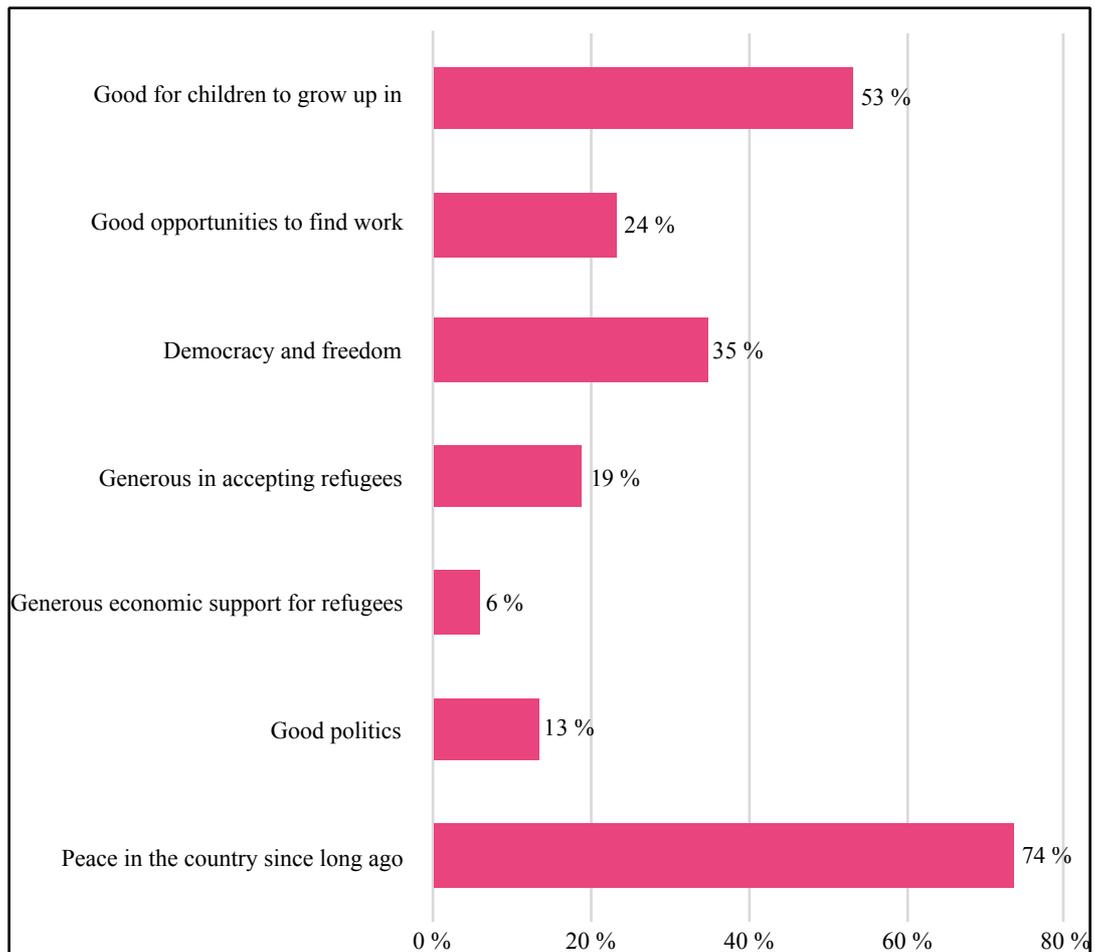
“I am looking for a peaceful country, to continue my study and establish a new start.”

“I heard Sweden is a paradise.”

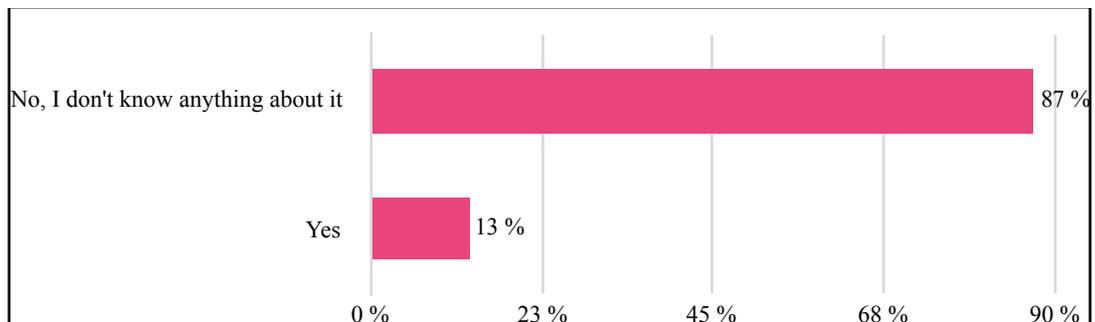
*“There is no discrimination in Sweden
based on religion or race,
I find Swedish people very kind.”*

*“I did some research about Sweden before
I came here, it is a very peaceful
country, and I had faced many
hardships during the trip to the EU.
I heard a lot about Sweden and the
dreamful life in this country!”*

Why did you choose to come to Sweden?



Are you familiar with the Swedish system of financial support to those who get a residence permit?



A quarter of the respondents express that things have turned out better than expected, and another quarter says that the situation they are in does not meet their expectations. Half feel that things are more or less as they expected. This is explicitly noted in the written questionnaire, where the respondents had to choose between these three alternatives. It is subsequently nuanced in the answers given to the question during the interviews, where a mix of experiences is discerned.

One recurrent experience is that an initial warm welcome, especially at the train stations, was followed by isolation and sometimes mistreatment at some of the asylum accommodations. Apart from the having experienced mistreatment by the managements of the asylum accommodations, other reasons for the respondents' fading sense of being welcomed have been long waiting time, and the stricter laws declared to be established in December 2015.

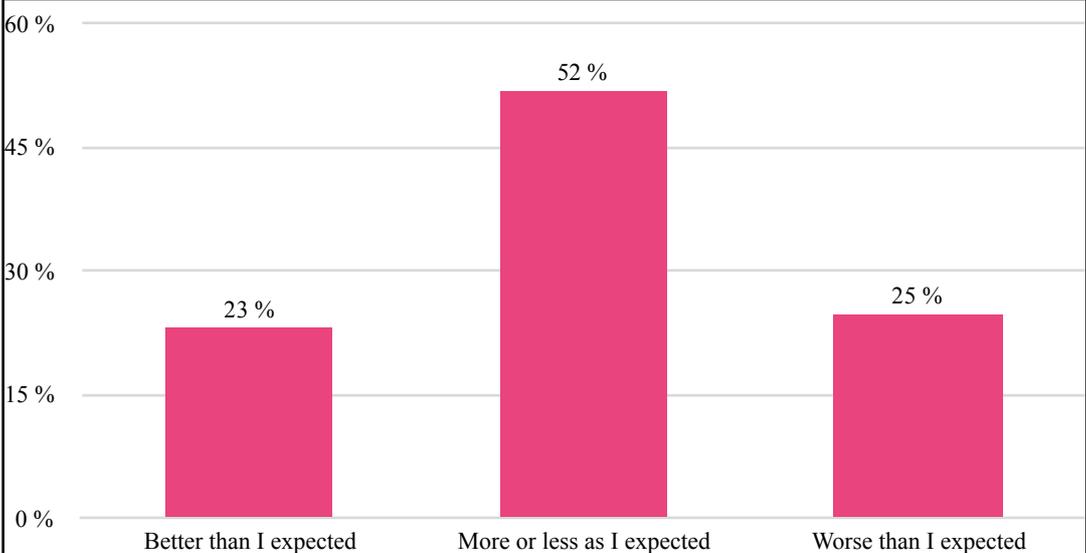
“I came here to have a new life, and to contribute to the society. I feel deceived, why did they open the door for us and promised us to have a better life here when nothing is provided in reality.”

“I went to Germany and I did not like it. Sweden is very good and better than Germany. They welcomed me, and they booked a taxi for me and the employee [at the Swedish Migration Agency] met me at 4 am.”

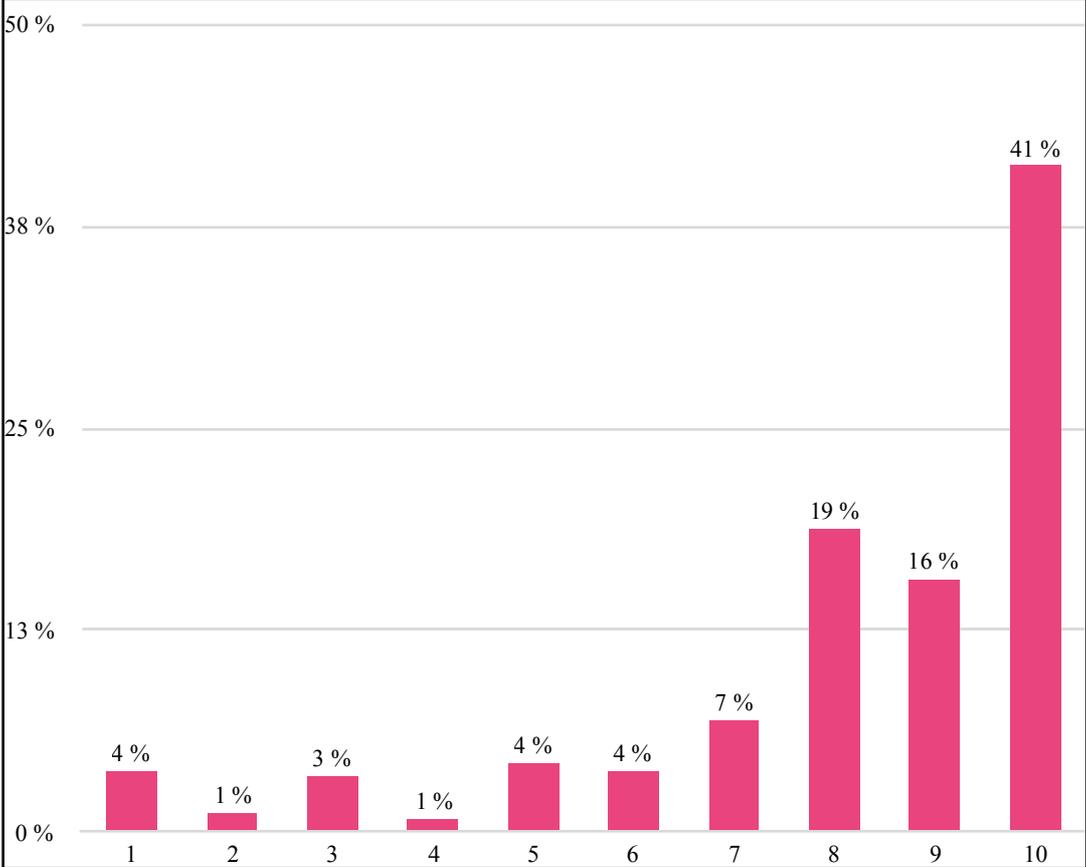
“In Germany, we got better opportunities to integrate; they used to solve our problems quickly. Here no one tries to help us at all.”

“Worse than expected, the situation here is very bad for refugees. It is hard to live here with permanent personal number. I think it can only be better if I received the decision and become a legal resident. I have been here five months now, and I have not got my decision yet.”

Have things turned out the way you expected in Sweden?



How would you grade the democracy in Sweden?



WHERE TO LIVE IN THE FUTURE

With a few exceptions, all of the respondents want to continue living in Sweden. When the question is raised about where in Sweden, around half want to stay in the municipality where they are currently accommodated, and half want to move. The ones desiring a move often think of bigger cities, either the closest bigger city, or any of the three biggest cities in Sweden: Gothenburg, Stockholm and Malmö.

The ones expressing motivation to continue living at same municipality often relate that desire to the treatment they have received. By the camp management and/or in the overall interactions with people in the area. The respondents express how this gives a comfortable feeling in building a new start there. In contrast to the respondents with opposite experiences, that have, for instance, faced punishment based treatments by the camp management and unpleasant experiences with people in the area. In some municipalities involved, this has been local or super local.

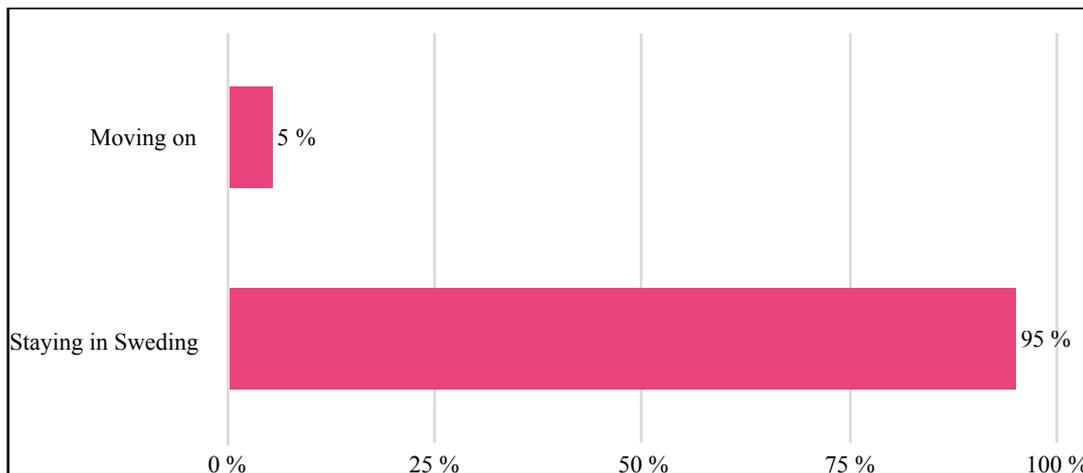
Respondents living in asylum accommodations in different areas of the same region or even the same municipality, have different experiences and thus also differences in their willingness to stay in the area after receiving the residence permit and being able to choose.

One out of five respondents transmit having experienced aggressive or neglecting acts as acts of racism. Worth mentioning is that a small share of the respondents had black complexion. Given that this group is the one most frequently facing discrimination and racism, it is possible that a sample with a bigger share of respondents from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, for instance, would have resulted in a bigger share of the asylum seekers having experienced racism. The experiences expressed in this study span from not receiving a response when asking about directions on the street to people having experienced an attempt of intentionally being run over by a car or more recurring being insulted and shouted at on the streets, or neglected or ignored by officials in different circumstances.

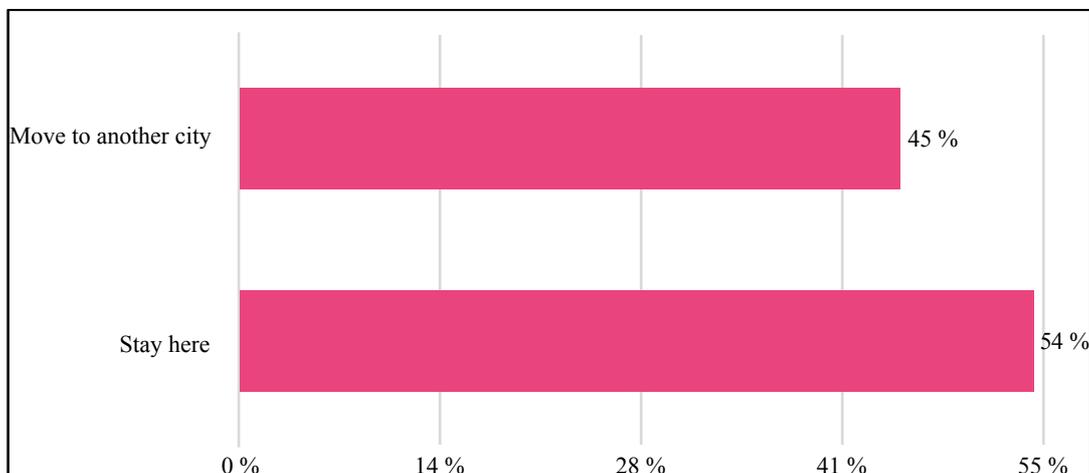
Other major influences for the choice of future habitat, is the possibility to get a job there and the existence of good schools for children. In the written questionnaire, the respondents were asked to prioritize and choose only two things that were the most important factors for choosing where to live. Job opportunities and the schools were the most chosen. The least important in this ranking was the surrounding nature and the presence of people from the same country of origin.

“It is not important for me to stay in Stockholm! I will move to any city where I can find a job. It is also important for me to live in a city where I could join a university.”

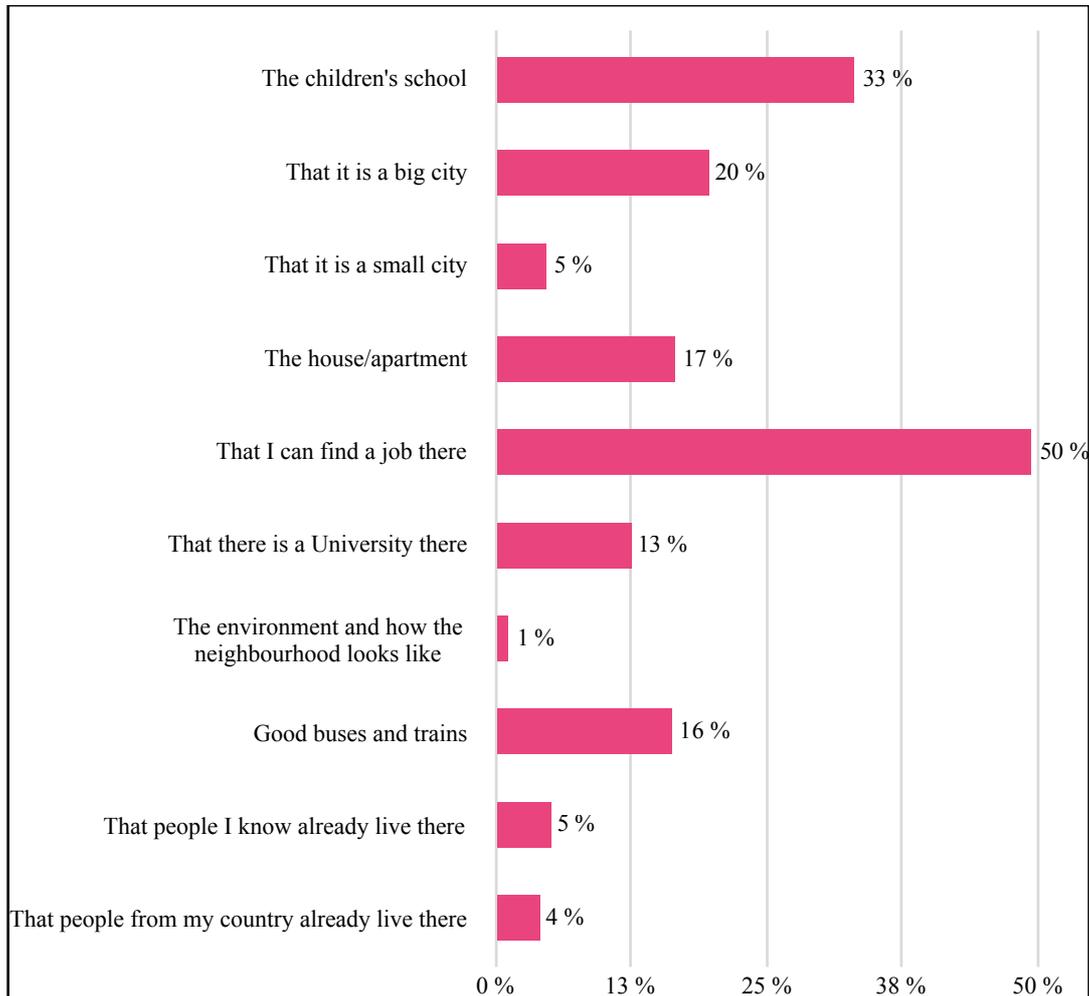
Are you staying in Sweden if you get the residence permit, or moving on?



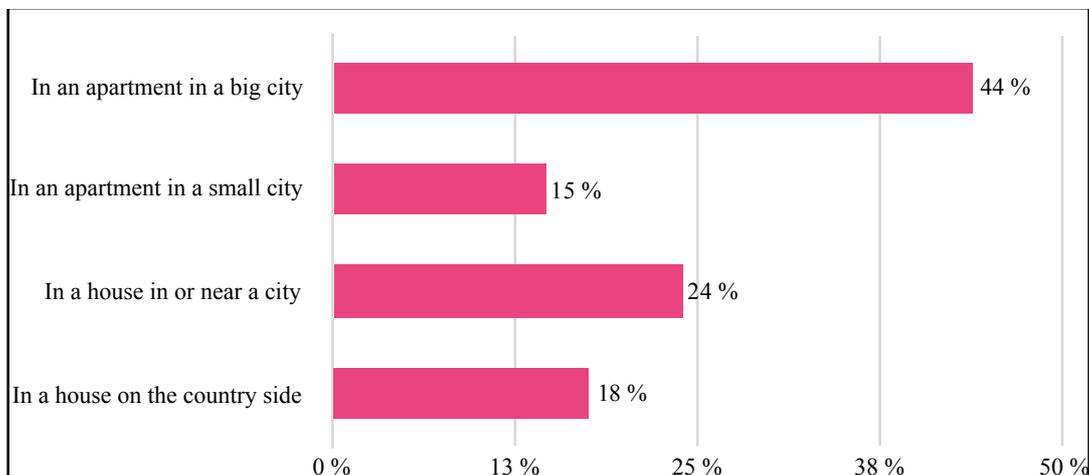
If you plan to stay, is it in this city, or another one?



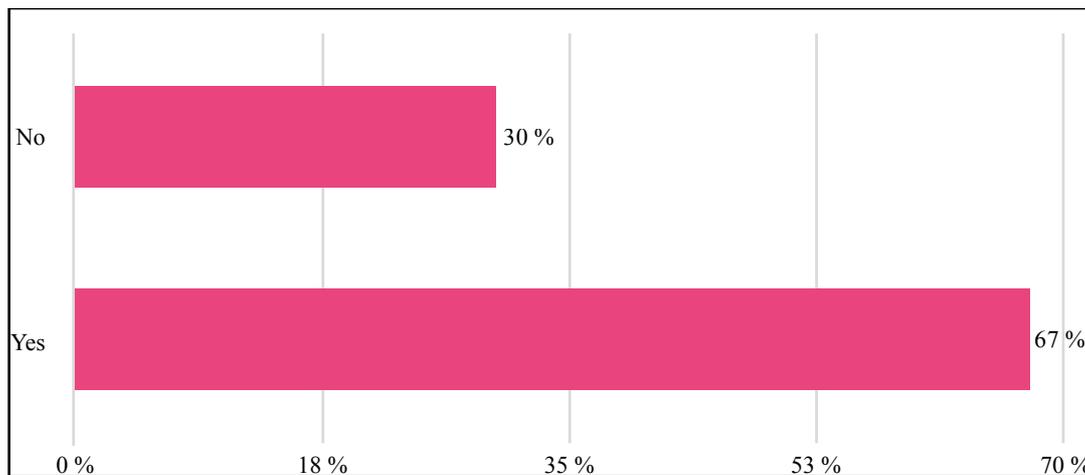
What will be the two most important things too chose what city or area for you to settle?



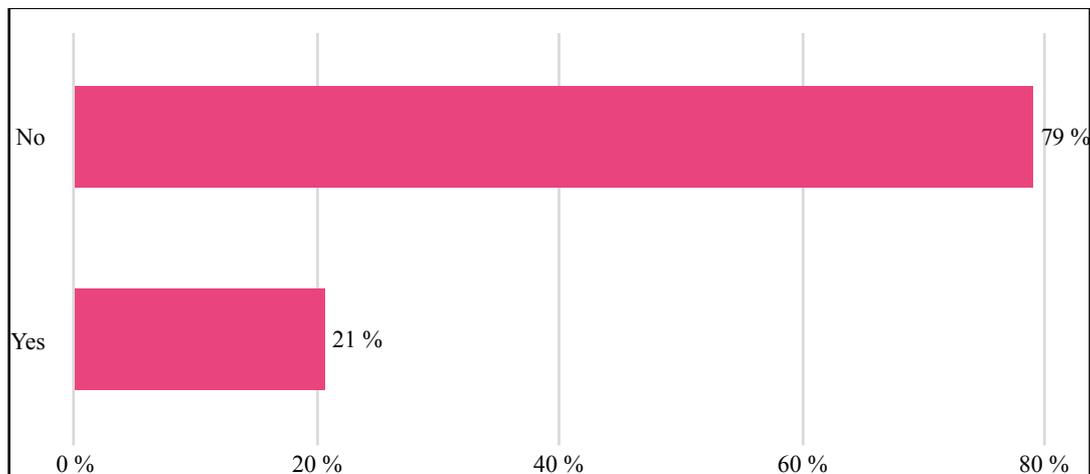
Where did you live before you came to Sweden?



Do you feel that you are able to get into the Swedish community as well as Swedish social contexts?

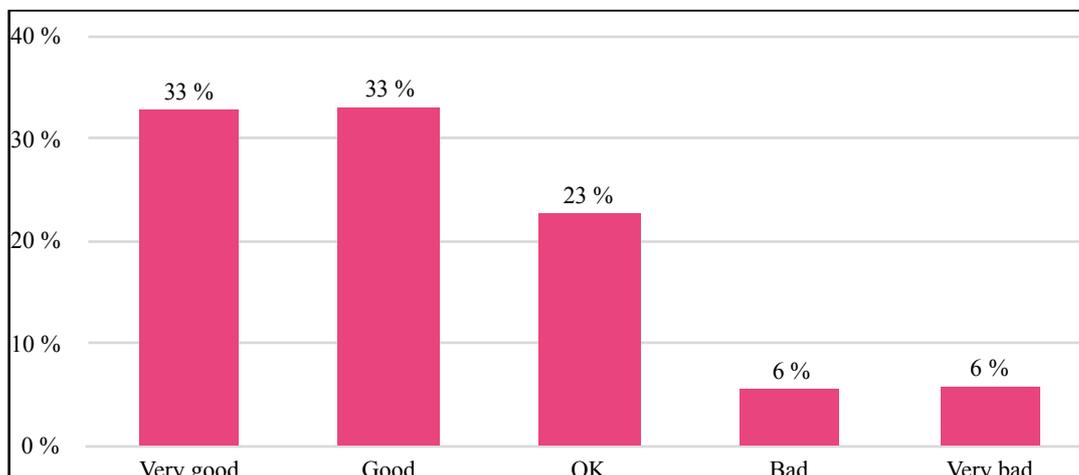


Have you personally been exposed to racism?
By staff or other people in Sweden?

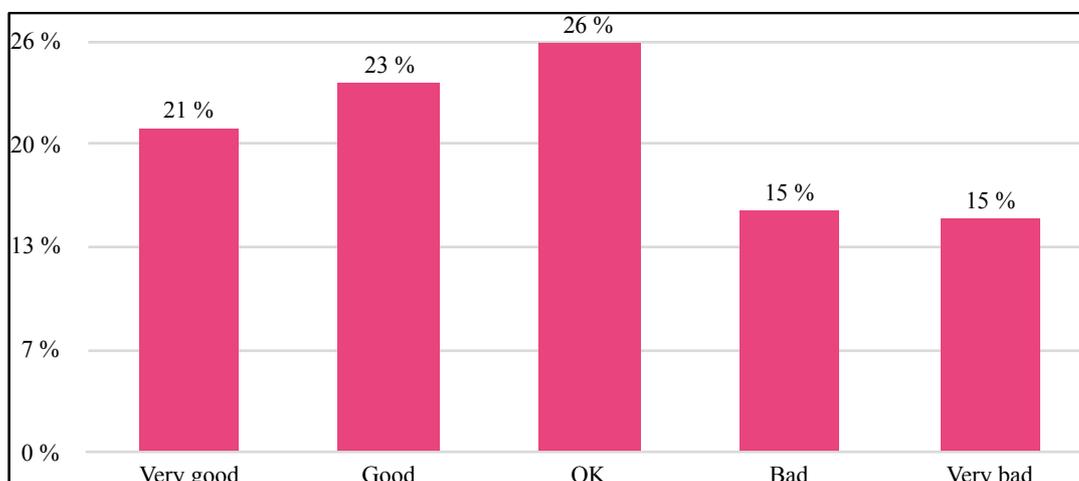


How have you been treated by the staff at the following places and institutions?

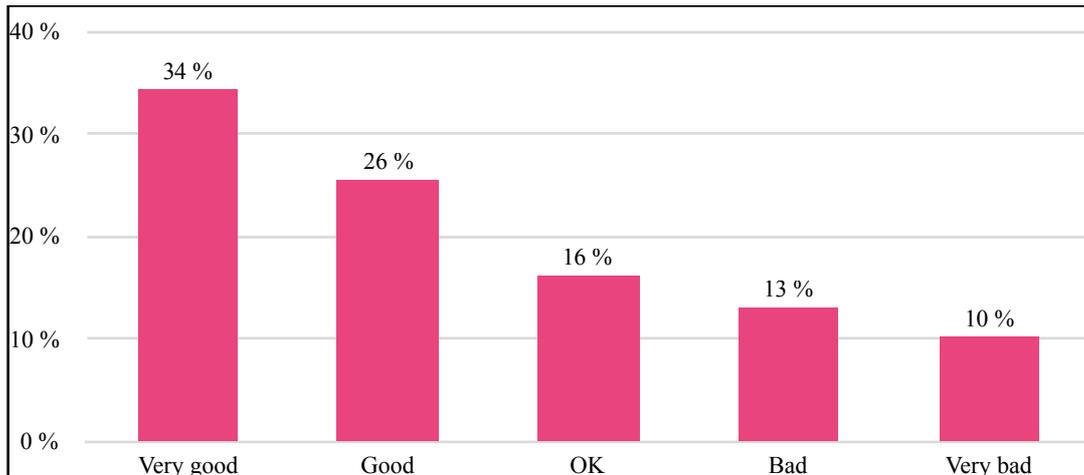
The Swedish Migration Agency



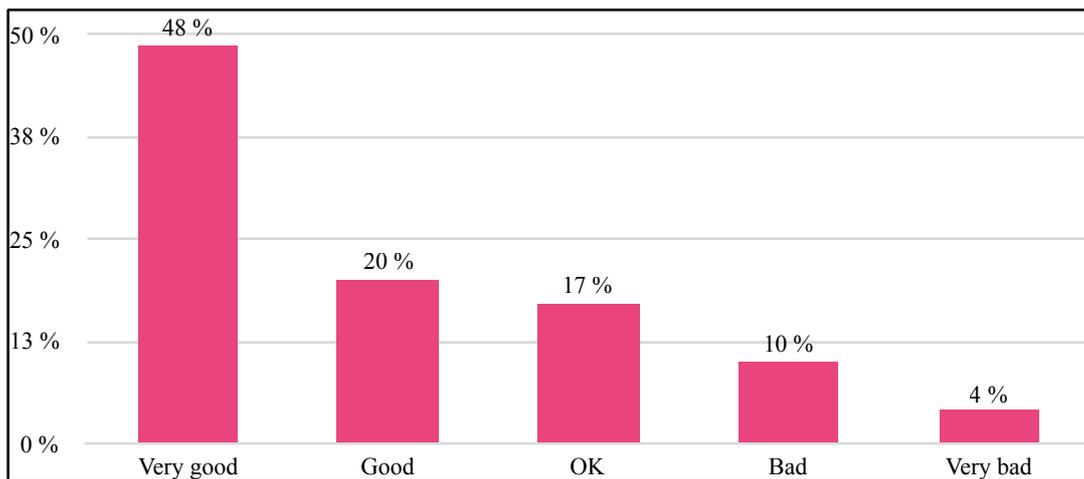
The Asylum Accommodation



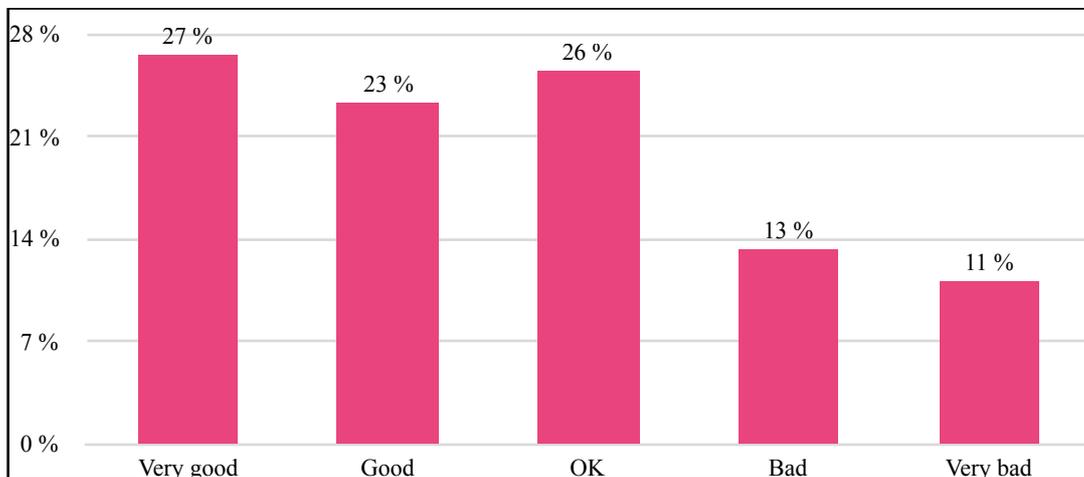
Health Centers/Hospitals



Your children's school



The Public Employment Office



WORK AND STUDIES

Three out of four respondents had a plan for how to get an employment, at the time of the interview. Three out of four also have an intention of studying to increase their employability. In the interviews, most respondents express that they would take any job offered to them, regardless of its character. In the written questionnaire, when asked how important it is for them to find a job that corresponds to their profession, two out of three say that it is important or very important.

An observation from the interviews is that flexibility seems to decrease with high education. Asylum seekers with higher expertise would like to continue their career within the same field, while people with fewer years of education or working are more willing to take any job. There are also respondents that express willingness to start studying from scratch, even if they already started a career in their home country. A few respondents that already had a bachelor or master in one field, express that they are planning on studying another university career in Sweden, having the understanding that validating their foreign examination wouldn't be enough, but preferring not to "redo" the same studies. In this way, they reason, they would have a Swedish degree, to meet the standards, and a better and wider education to compete with.

There is a recurrent complaint in several groups about the black market for jobs and how asylum seekers are being misused in the system. Black market jobs are being the most offered to them, and most of the offered jobs are limited to cleaning and helping in restaurants or hotels. Most of the respondents decline these offers.

All off the respondents believe that they have to learn Swedish in order to get more job opportunities, including the respondents that are fluent in English.

Hence, learning the language is a priority for most asylum seekers. Many notice how kids and teenagers overtake adults with more advanced language skills, after entering school. The respondents point out three key obstacles for learning Swedish while waiting for the decision on their asylum application: First, the lack of organized language school for adults, at the camps or outside. Second, the lack of interaction with Swedish speaking people, an obstacle underlined by those living at accommodations located far from the local downtown. Third, the weak internet connection at some of the accommodations, that make it difficult for the asylum seekers to study online. The under aged seem to have a stronger feeling of already

having started a new life, while living in the asylum accommodation, and seem motivated to continue their studies.

As for children, one out of five respondents have children attending school and these are generally satisfied by the provided education. However, the instability caused by forced moves to new asylum accommodations in new municipalities, affect the continuity of their children's education and settlement. At the most, one family recalls having moved to new accommodations seven times in less than a year.

“I’m an engineer assistant. I would like to work in my profession. This is very important. I’m about 50 years old. What should I do else. This is the only thing that I’m skilled in.”

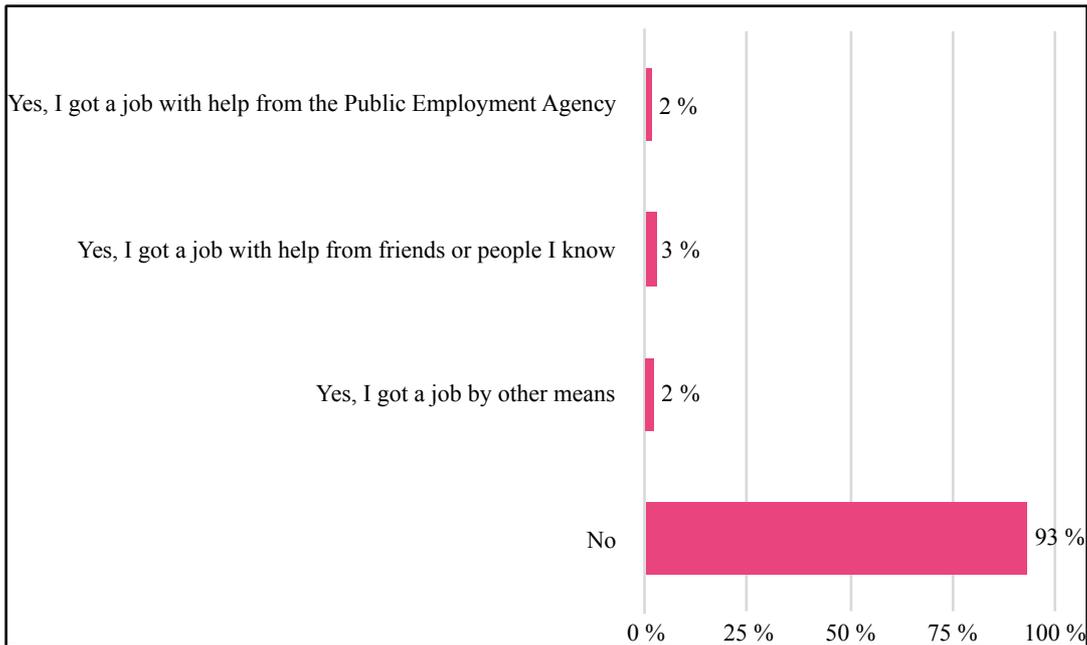
“I hope that I will be an active member in the Swedish society! I would like to start learning the Swedish language as soon as possible to be able to integrate in this society. I have already a master degree in electronic engineering.”

“Yes, we are satisfied. People like me, who are below 20 years old, get the benefits of studying in Swedish while living in the camp. But older people do not have any opportunities.”

“I would like to study music and understand more about the Swedish music.”

“Most of the Swedes speak English. I think it will not be a problem to find a job in English. I think there are a lot of jobs that do not require a Swedish language. Some of my friends are working in Arabic restaurants and they only speak Arabic.”

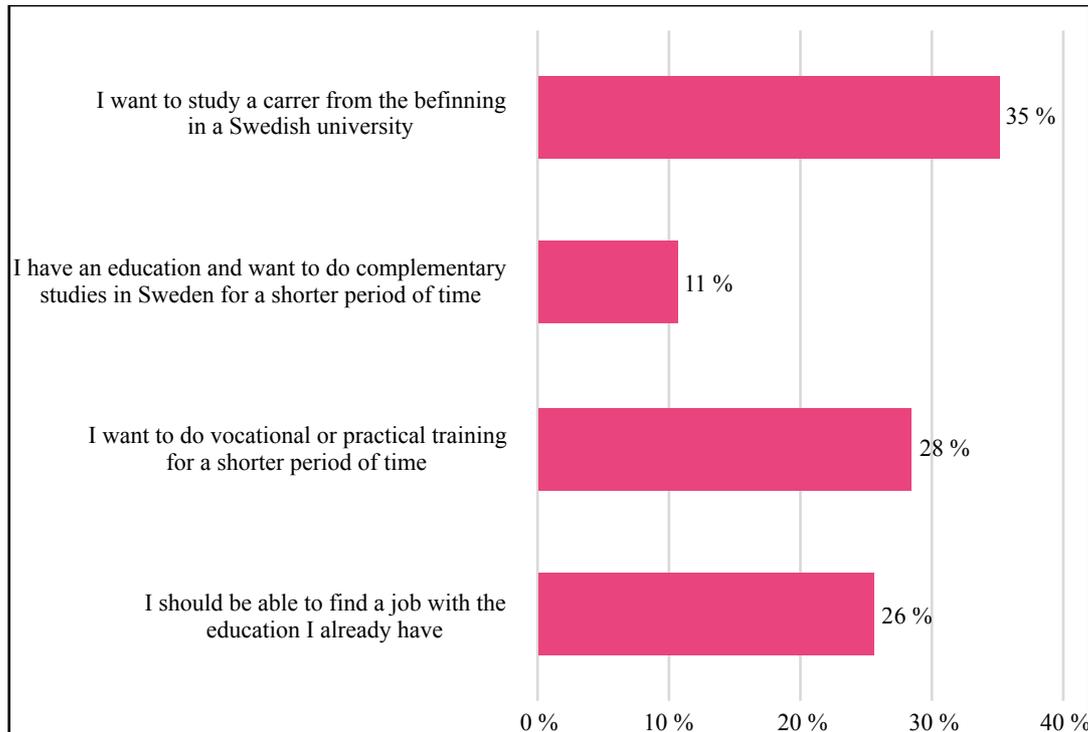
Are you currently working?



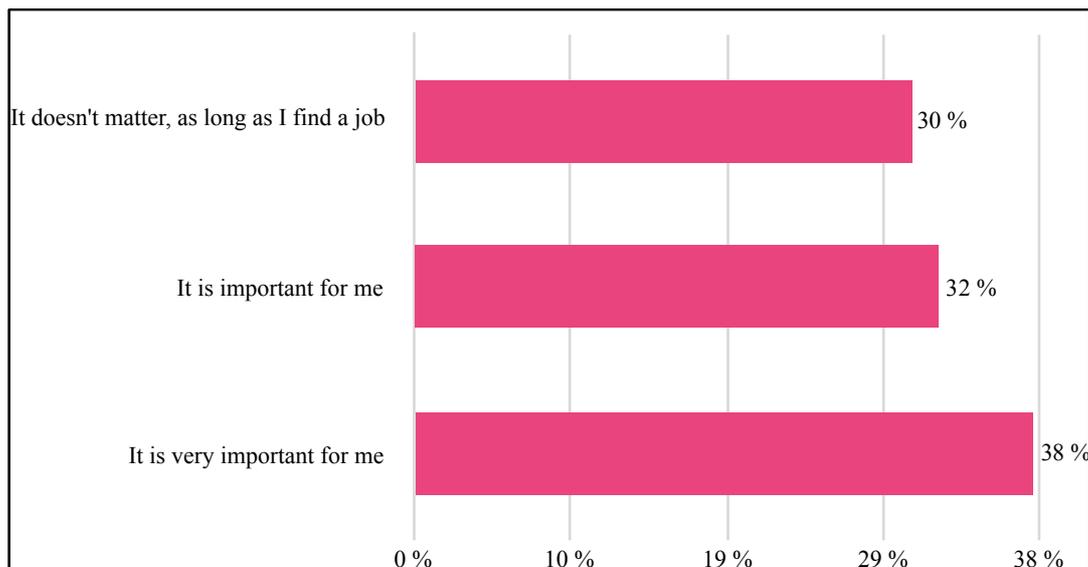
If you don't have a job at the moment, do you have a plan for how to find one?



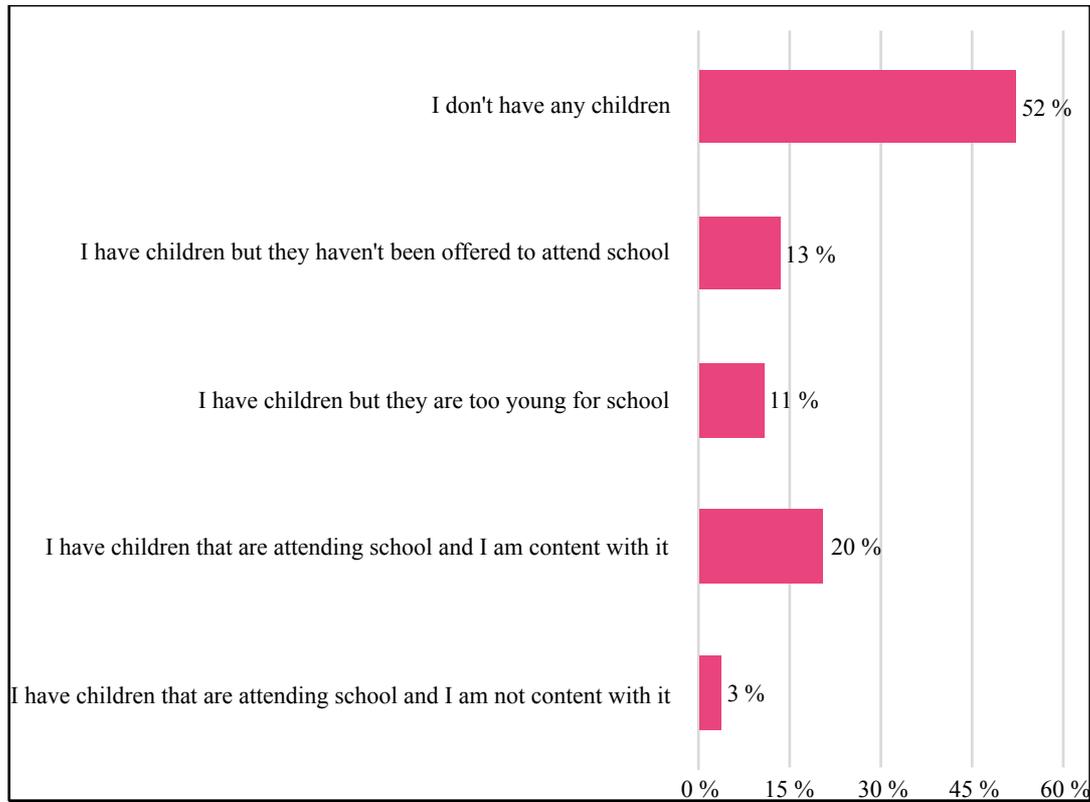
Do you have a plan for how to develop your studies in the future?



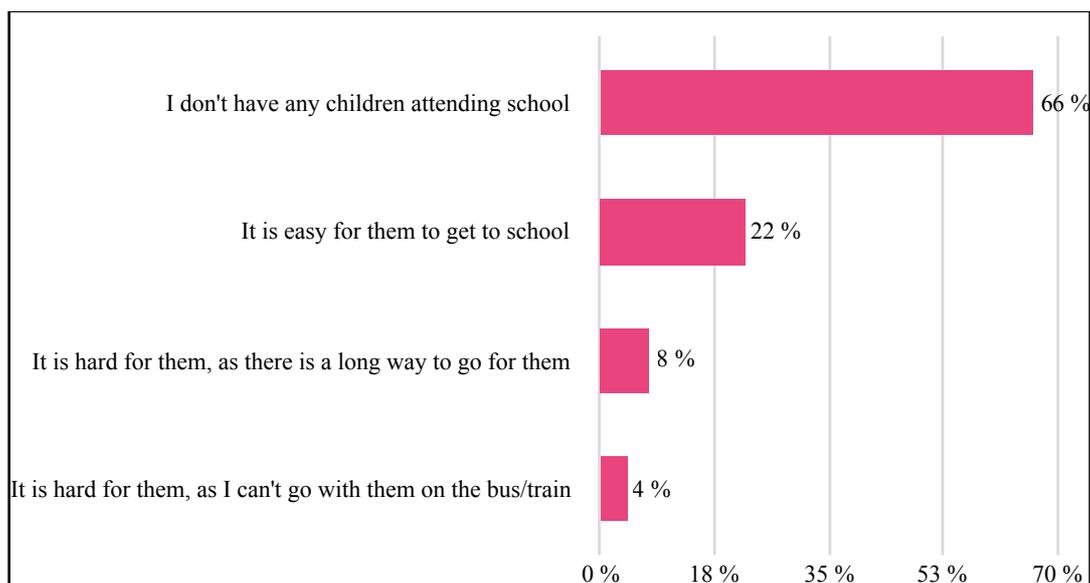
How important is it for you to find a job that corresponds to your profession, further on?



How satisfied are you with the schooling of your children – if you have any?



How satisfied are you with the schooling of your children – if you have any?



HEALTH AND FAMILY

One out of three respondents express their need for psychological support. This figure is revealed by the responses in the written questionnaire, where responses were given individually, anonymously and in silence. While, in conversation during the interviews, the figure was not as high; around one out of four expressed the same need. Given this and that there can be some kind of negligence bias also on the result from the written questionnaire, due to the delicacy of the question, it might be more than one out of third in need of support.

In our interviews, if not initially so consequently, all respondents welcomed the opportunity to speak with us about personal issues related to their situation: their loneliness in Sweden, being far away from their family members, the pressures they face at the asylum accommodations and the worries that they are carrying about their future in Sweden and the future of their family members who are waiting in their home countries. One third of the respondents strived to reunite with family members, on average 1.5 adults and 1.5 children for each respondent that had this ambition.

At some accommodations, there are added pressures from the management. For example, in some places they use punishments and threats of transferring the residents to remote camps as a way to enforce group discipline, according to respondents living there. At some of the accommodations, the management had obviously ignored the health conditions of the people. A man with asthmatic condition was given a humid room that was completely unsuitable to his health condition, but the camp manager refused to change the room despite having medical reports proving his condition. In another camp a man that had suicidal tendencies had several times expressed the need of a psychologist without being helped. The residents in this accommodation had a high concern for this man and took turns in making him company, even at night, not wanting to leave him by himself, to minimize risks of a suicide attempt. None of the asylum seekers interviewed, from this gravity of mental health to less dramatic situations, had been offered to speak with any psychologist or like, nor had they obtained the possibility when asked for it.

When it comes to the physical health, there is a diverse pattern of experiences. The results from the written questionnaire show that around half of the respondents feel they have not had any problems with their physical condition, while half of them have. Of those who have had problems, half feel they have got help. Some have not recurred to a doctor or nurse, and some have recurred to one but not felt they have

received any help or treatment. It is more common though, that the ones having visited a doctor feel that they got helped. In the interviews this seems to span from people with big haemorrhoids that couldn't sit on a chair during our talk and someone that wanted medicine for a cold and didn't get it. It is hard to say in how many situations they have been dismissed without help, when needed, but it is sure to say that it is something that happens on a regular basis.

“Psychological satisfaction starts with a good treatment at the camp. We do not need a doctor, we need better treatment.”

“There is a rising frustration due to the increasing difficulties in bringing a family.”

“What to say! Exhausted and distressed. Feeling a lot of pressures, great tension and so many worries.”

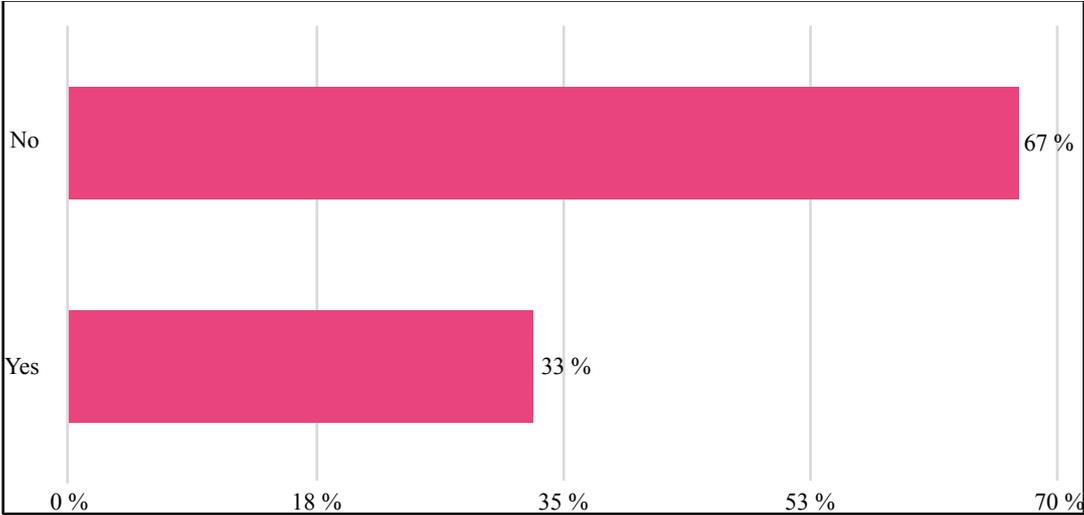
*“No, I don’t need such a support.
But, I would like to get rid of the tension
that I feel. I have a nonstop headache.”*

*“Yes. I need it.
But, should I pay to get it?”*

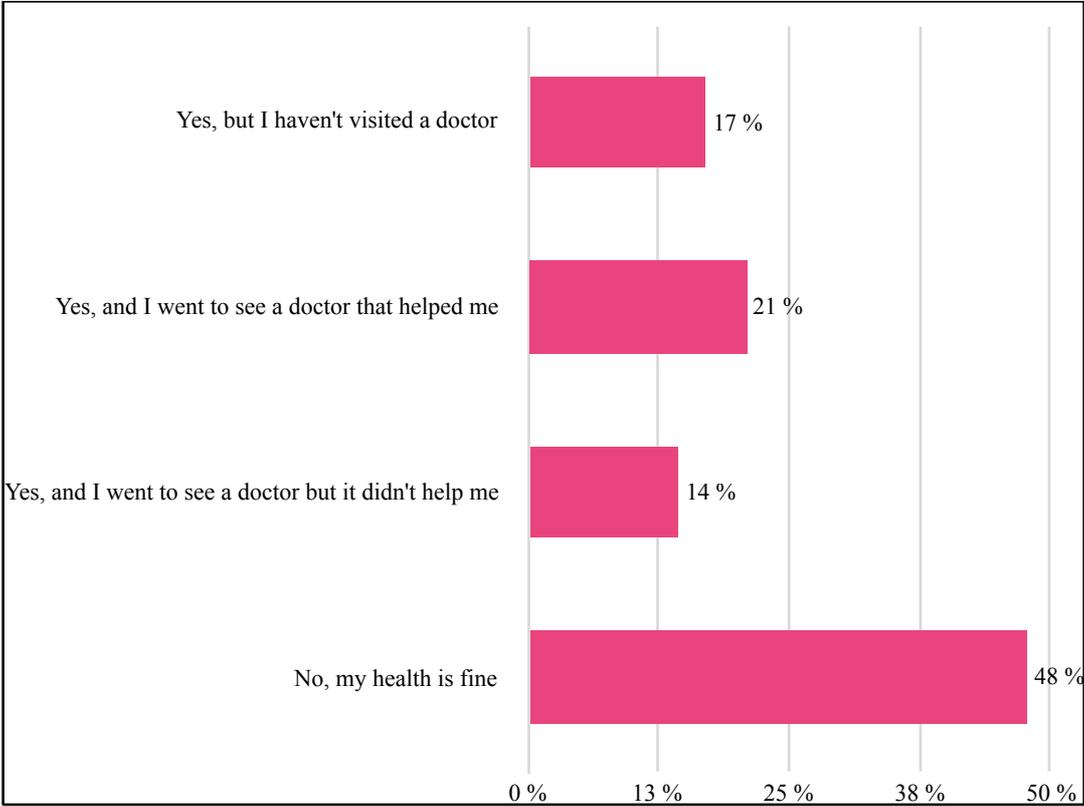
*“I am worried more about the future,
when my kids will come here from
Syria, when I will get the decision to
start working.”*

*“Some terrorist killed my parents and
took my family house in 2006.
I got a shock and I used to follow up
with a doctor and took some medicine.
I am afraid to declare this to
immigration because they might take
away my kids, so I will wait
until I receive my residence permit then
follow up again with the hospital.”*

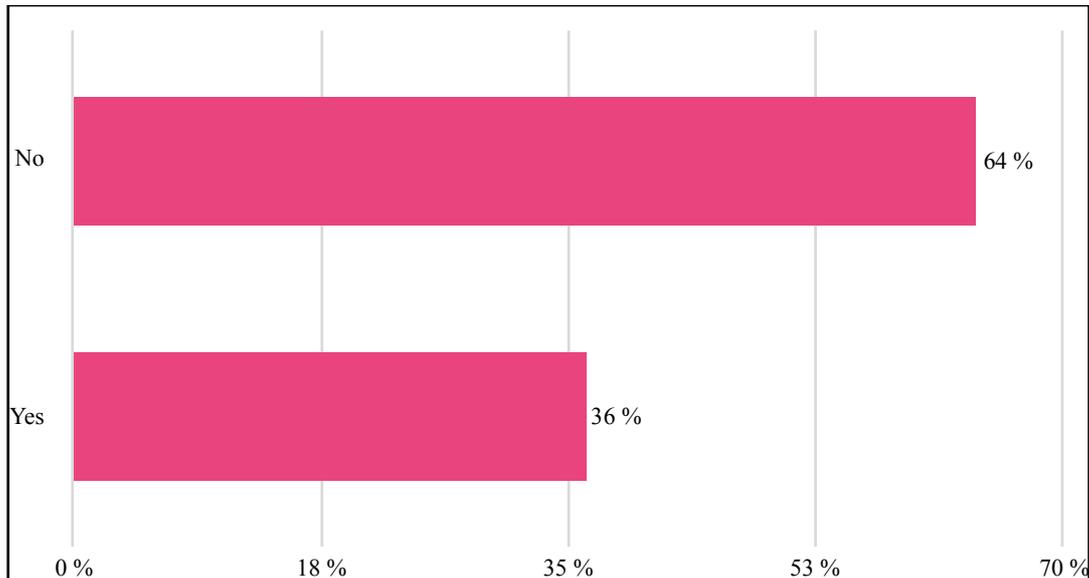
Would you like to talk to a professional psychologist about the difficulties you have been or are currently going through?



Do you have any problems with your health or your body?

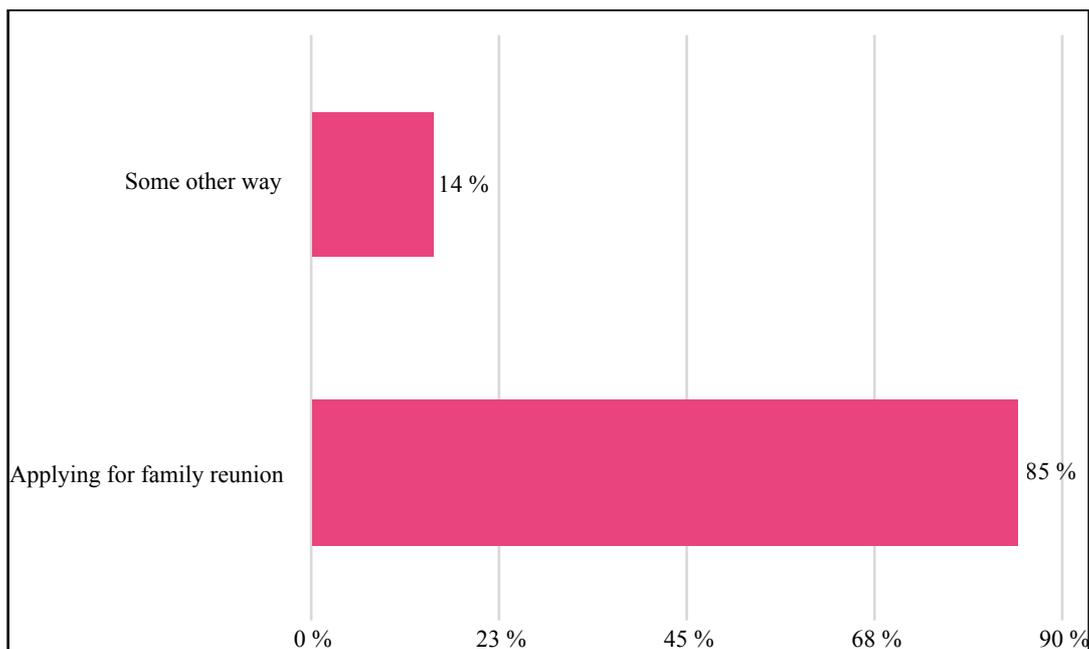


Did you leave family in the country you left, that you are planning on bringing here?



The respondents who state that they strive for a family reunion want to bring, on average, 1.5 adults and 1.5 children per person to Sweden.

How are you planning for them to get here?



THE STUDY'S METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to compensate for the inherent weaknesses within both quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods, this study has made use of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In total 456 respondents have participated in structured interviews that have mainly been carried out in the format of focus groups. 319 of these respondents have completed a paper survey before the interviews in focus groups. These surveys have been available in Swedish, Farsi/Dari, and Arabic. The reason why not all respondents filled in this particular printed form survey is that we added it as part of the study after the first 120 interviews. During two different interview occasions with focus groups we also found that surveys were missing.

The interviews in the focus groups have been conducted in the mother tongue of the participants. The staff at Sweden Research have taken notes in Arabic, and/or Farsi/Dari, or simultaneously translated to Swedish. When the notes have been written in Arabic, and/or Farsi/Dari, they have always been translated afterwards. The exceptions have been one interview that was conducted with an interpreter, one interview that was conducted in Spanish, and two in English with participants from different countries that spoke these languages.

The interviews have been conducted with respondents living in asylum housings. Above all the respondents have lived in asylum accommodations run by the private sector, but also in housings rented by the Swedish Migration Agency, which in those cases have consisted of public accommodations with self-catering. Two interviews have also been made in residential care homes for children and young persons (HVB-homes, in Swedish). Thirteen of the respondents have gotten their municipality placement and obtained their residence permit. Otherwise the interviews have been conducted with people who at the time were waiting for a decision concerning their application for asylum.

The sampling of respondents was made by contacting all 290 Swedish municipalities requesting to get information about available asylum accommodations as well as possible contact details. The Swedish Migration Agency was also contacted simultaneously, asked to provide information about procured facilities for asylum seekers and where in Sweden these were located, which they did provide. The selection was subsequently made partially through a geographical cluster sampling, in

order to spread it out in Sweden. The selection of asylum accommodations within each geographical cluster was then divided into three steps: first the accommodations that had available contact details, then the accommodations that we could get hold of from the available contact information, and in the last phase the asylum housings that, after having been contacted, allowed staff from Sweden Research to go there and conduct the study.

Once at the asylum accommodation the staff from Sweden Research either informed the tenants about the study directly, or tenants got to receive the information about the study in advance. The staff at Sweden Research have, at every given moment, dedicated time and effort when it comes to speaking with the asylum seekers to make sure that they understood the nature and the aims of the study, consequently building up a trust between the tenants and the staff from the Swedish Research. This facilitated the inclusion of respondents that initially did not want to participate, mostly due to initial concerns about anonymity, weariness about the risk of their participation having negative influence on the handling of their application or worries about their experiences and thoughts not being relevant for the study.

The UNHCR has presented methodological and ethical considerations that become more important when studies are performed where refugees are the main subjects for the interviews. One of these is the difficulty in making a selection that strives to be as representative as possible, from a group that is so large, diverse and that change over short periods of time. For instance, at the time of the start of our study, November 1st 2015, there were 141 869 people registered in The Swedish Migration Agency's reception system. The 1st of June 2016, three days after our last interview, the figure had changed to 164 842. Apart from pointing out the amount of asylum seekers in the selection in relation to the total number of them, it also underlines the challenge that the UNHCR addresses: the group categorized as refugees, is, apart from being a heterogeneous group, also a group whose composition, proportions, and character, undergo constant changes, many times often sudden and considerable.

This study provides a collected and summarized picture of what the 456 interviewed persons expressed that they thought, knew, felt, and planned at the time they were interviewed.

The UNHCR highlight the importance of continued studies of and with refugees, not in the least qualitative studies. They view these kinds of studies as central in order to "transform an unknown 'mass' into something human and graspable in the eyes of the decision-makers", to quote the UNHCR-representative Kimberly Roberson's words

during a lecture on this particular theme on the 16th of May 2016 at the EU-seminar during the International Conference on Asylum-Related Migration Research.

There are more ethical considerations involved when it comes to humans in a vulnerable situation that function as the subject for a study. In this case our interviewers have had to balance their consideration and respect with the strive for having a relevant sample. For instance, on one hand they have had to show consideration for an asylum seeker who is invited but does not want to participate in an interview. On the other hand, they have also had to ask follow up questions about their aversion and have tried to give information that could calm that person's uneasiness. This procedure was followed in order to get a sample of respondents that did not solely contain asylum seekers that without hesitation were willing to participate, as such sampling would have conveyed a risk of bias in the results.

We believe that our study approach has resulted in a wider range and representation of persons in different situations and with several different kinds of experiences.

One of the key factors in gaining the trust of those who were asked to participate was, as we see it, that the staff at Sweden Research spoke the same language as the respondents. Several of the interviewers were also themselves refugees or had a background as such, either recently or further back in life.

Everyone's anonymity has been preserved and when the respondents have stated name or contact information this has been made on a voluntary basis. Additionally, when a person that we have interviewed has expressed that he or she is considering committing suicide we have contacted relevant authorities in the municipality without exposing the person's anonymity.



SWEDEN RESEARCH

Sweden Research conducts studies and analysis in issues concerning social sustainability and urban development for authorities, municipalities, and other publicly financed organizations. This study is written by Menna Elsahly and Carlos Rojas, subsequently to having been analyzed by the authors together with Muna Mohammad. Other collaborators have been Khaldoun Agha, Sanna Verner-Carlsson, Asmaa Sherif, Sohrab Fadai, Roya Ghalandarpour, Mohammad Vojdani, Nadia Louis, Jonya Demir, Rita Hindy, Imen Ayeb and four other assistants still waiting for their decision on their residence permit, not wanting to appear with their names.

Sweden Research underwent a change of name in august 2016, thus during the work with the study between November 2015 and June 2016, the name of the research center was the previous, Miklo. This means that every contact with asylum accommodations, municipalities, agencies and respondents were made using the name of Miklo.

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