

Undocumented children



Report from the Save the Children project utanpapper.nu
a helpline for undocumented children.

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We raise issues and provide support for children in difficult circumstances
in Sweden and the world.

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It is a world where every child is appreciated, respected, where all
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All I want is to land
[free translation]

Yo!
I came from Bolivia, a place called La Paz
I've come to Sweden, here I stand fast
Sweden! Here I stand fast
When I was eight I came with my mum
My brother's name's Simon, we came to settle d'un
We came to settle d'un!
But they told us no, we couldn't stay
All I want is to land
at Arlanda (...)

Camp! No-one has to work
Camp! No-one's illegal
Camp! All like me
Camp! This is my song
Camp! No-one has to work
Camp! No-one's illegal
Camp! All like me
Camp! This is my song

(...) Yo!
I'm from Bolivia, a place called la Paz
I've come here to Sweden
Yes, here I stand fast
Sweden! Here I stand fast!
When I was eight I came with my mum
My brother's name's Simon, we came to settle d'un
We came to settle d'un...
We came to settle d'un...
We came to settle d'un...
All I want is to land!

Simon and Sergio
rap performed at the *IMÅI* summer camp, July 2007

Foreword

'All I want is to land...' That is how a ten-year old boy rapped at one of the summer camps for undocumented children organised by the association *Ingen Människa är Illegal* (IMAI – No One is Illegal) supported by the Save the Children project *Utanpapper.nu*.

When the project's helpline for undocumented children opened in March 2006 it had sprung from a growing realisation that an increasing number of children and adolescents, alone or with their relations, move like flying Dutchmen between the countries of the world, unable to land anywhere. Some are equally undocumented in their countries of origin as they are in the countries they flee to. They live on the outside of the societies within which they exist without access to their human rights and without even having their existence recognised.

For Save the Children, as an organisation promoting the rights of children, this is an immediate concern. The rights of children, as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, apply to all children always and everywhere.

One important principle for the Save the Children Centre for children and adolescents in crisis, which ran the project, is 'to see what others do not'. It is about focusing on those children and those problems which are not recognised or spoken of within public healthcare, schools and care institutions, about making those children who have been rendered invisible visible. The Centre can also draw upon experience from psychotherapeutic work with traumatised children and adolescents who live in Sweden in hiding.

In this final report experiences gained from the project are presented. It deals with children and adolescents and their relations who have sought out the helpline. It also – and perhaps predominantly – deals with how we as professionals or as concerned individuals can contribute to improving things for them.

The risk is that precisely these children's vulnerability and complete lack of safety in the society which will not even admit their existence is the factor which renders it particularly difficult for them to gain help and support. We tend not to see problems we cannot solve. Those who try to help can also feel alone and helpless. This report provides inspiration for all who wish to help improve the lives of undocumented children. That help can be by listening to the children, by passing on their experiences and by influencing political decision making, but also by contributing to making their childhood as good as possible. These children, like all other children and adolescents, need to go to school, meet other children, receive care when they are ill and have adults to talk to and receive support from. Their childhood is here and now and cannot wait until their papers have the requisite stamps and signatures and all the decisions have been taken.

The dedicated project which has been running since 2006 is now over. But the undocumented children and adolescents remain. How to guarantee their rights will continue to occupy the employees and members of Save the Children.



Lars Carlsson
Head of Domestic department



Cecilia Modig
Head of Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crises

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I. Alike and unlike

On 21 March 2006 Save the Children opened the *Utanpapper* helpline, including a website and a freephone number for undocumented children. During its two years of operation children, parents and contact persons contacted the helpline from different places in Sweden to ask for advice or help in relation to approximately 470 children and young adults. This section deals with the different situations the children find themselves in and the problems they experience. But they are not just different. The children have one problem in common – the insecurity of their situation.

The very day the helpline opened the first mail arrived, sent from the website. The girl who wrote had come to Sweden when she was 16, and she had gone into hiding when her application was rejected. She is in irregular employment and the salary barely covers the rent of a room in a basement. A big problem for her is that as soon as an employer finds out that she does not have any papers he feels that he can use her. At first she would change jobs when sex came up, but eventually she gave up. Now she is 21 but she still dreams of a normal life and studies but she cannot see any way out; all she does is cry. Her question was if we could help her find a psychologist or ‘medication for suffering’ as she put it.

The website was called *www.utanpapper.nu*. The expression “utan papper” [= without documentation] refers to a particular kind of document, namely a “paper” which gives a human being the right to live in Sweden. It can be a certificate of leave to remain (for individuals from non-EU countries) or of right to remain (for EU-citizens and their relatives) or a certificate of grant of asylum. If you do not have it – and cannot show that you are a citizen of Sweden or a Nordic country – you are “undocumented”.

The expression “undocumented” is sometimes used to denote those living irregularly in Sweden without having applied for leave to remain. This is to differentiate them from those “in hiding”, usually reserved for those who used to be asylum seekers. Save the Children wanted to reach undocumented children irrespectively of how they ended up in Sweden.

The website did not contain a complicated definition. Those who found it could decide for themselves whether or not they belonged to the target group. The title was “The helpline for children without leave to remain” and the text underneath said: “Do you live in Sweden without the proper paper? Do you want to talk to an adult about your situation? Do you want to know more about your rights?”

The rest left it open for in principle any question: “We can try to help you if you want to go to school or need to see a doctor. We cannot arrange for a permit for you to stay in Sweden, but we can help you find out what the rules are and how they apply to you”. The text on the contact page reassured: “We

are here if you need help with something, or if you want to talk. Nothing is too small or too big.”

The girl who e-mailed about her hopeless situation was the first to make contact. The contact was designated with the number 1 in the logbook which has been part of the project. Each new contact was given a number in the logbook. Further contacts with the same person or family were logged under the same number.

Two years later a designated representative who worried about a decision to expel a Palestinian boy who had arrived alone rang. That “case” became the last in the logbook, number 593. On 21 March 2008 the helpline was closed for new calls. At that point some 30 adolescents and families were current and the further contacts with them were logged for a further three months.

Facts about the children

The logbook with the 593 contacts is the basis for the statistics and fact sections in this report. It contains no names, numbers or other identifying information. Case descriptions and quotes which appear in the report have been taken from the logbook (or from journals for children who have been to therapy), but have been modified to prevent identification.

The expression “contacts” is here used to designate contact with an individual or a family. That means that several children can be concerned through the same contact. About half of the 593 contacts, 310 of them, were with someone situated in Sweden, 283 were from abroad. The 310 “Sweden contacts” concerned about 470 children and young adults (approximately 380 children under the age of 18 and 90 young adults between 18 and 25).

There is a significant spread in age with a slight predominance of younger children. Of the young adults and the oldest children most are boys which reflects the fact that most separated refugee children are boys.

Of the 310 contacts two thirds concerned families with children. About one fourth concerned children and young adults who had come alone. The rest, a small share, concerns adults without children or questions asked without it having become clear if a child was involved.

Where it transpires from where in Sweden the contacts were made, more than half come from towns outside the three agglomerations. Among the big agglomerations, Stockholm is totally dominant. Few contacts were made from Gothenburg or Malmö.

Approximately 60 countries of origin are represented among those who have made contact from Sweden. The spread is considerable between countries in the Arab world, ex-Soviet Union, Europe (mainly the Balkans), Afghanistan and Iran, South America and southern Africa. Only five countries have been given as the country of origin more than 10 times: Iraq (34), Afghanistan (19), Kosovo (14), Azerbaijan (13) and Russia (12).

Contacts from abroad

In relation to the e-mails from abroad, the geographical spread is much smaller. More than 85 percent of the e-mails were sent from countries in the Middle East, if you include those which did not disclose a country but which were written in Arabic. The most common countries were Iraq and Palestine.

The e-mails from abroad fell into two main categories. Some correspondents give their CV or say that they wish to continue their studies or seek employment in Sweden. They ask how to proceed. The other main category is constituted by those who relate their vulnerable situation and that they cannot stay in their country of origin. They ask if it is possible to be granted asylum in Sweden. A few e-mails falling into both categories indicate that the categories may not be so different even if one person chooses to focus on his or her own resources and another on the dangers which force him or her to leave. A few also combine the motives by describing how persecution or warfare have forced them to abandon their studies or work – now they wish to continue elsewhere.

A smaller number of e-mails contain concrete questions about for instance Schengen visa or rules for family reunification.

It is difficult to assess the age spread among those who have sent questions from abroad. Judging by the little age information available and other circumstances it is predominantly young men, but even some fathers. Women and girls feature but rarely.

Contacts from Sweden

Undocumented children in Sweden constitute the projects core target group and the descriptions in the following parts of the chapter are solely concerned with the approximately 470 children and young individuals concerned by the contacts made from Sweden.

The project's mission was to make contact with undocumented children, mainly those lacking adult support. However, the text on the website did not exclude asylum seeking children or children in families.

Utanspapper made contact with children and adolescents from every conceivable category. The legal status of the children is almost as varied as their geographical origins. The most striking thing, however, is how difficult it is to maintain the distinction between asylum seeker/hidden/undocumented, and the number of families where different individuals have differing legal status.

By using a strict definition of everyone's status at the first contact with the helpline we can establish that almost 210 out of 470 children and young adults had been asylum seekers whose applications had been finally rejected ("hidden"). Approximately 35 children and adolescents were – at the time of contact – in Sweden without a permit but without having applied for asylum, i.e. they had come to relations or in order to work without a permit ("undocumented"). Among them were a few orphans who had been taken

care of by relations in Sweden. 60 were asylum seekers and around 25 had some kind of visa or temporary permit.

All of these 330 children and adolescents were at that time situated in Sweden without permanent leave to remain. Of the 470 there remain 140. Of these around half were still in the country of origin or a transit country and half were in Sweden with right or leave to remain. The fact that children residing abroad appear under the heading "contacts from Sweden" results from someone in the child's family who resides in Sweden having made contact.

Those children who reside in other countries and those who have leave to remain in Sweden can seem to constitute two completely different groups. In reality some of them are siblings. The fact that as many as approximately 70 children and adolescents who have a legal right to live in Sweden appear among the contacts is mainly due to family break-up. These are families who have been forced to leave children in their countries of origin, young couples who have met in Sweden and who face separation and children who may live in Sweden but whose parents are to be expelled. A smaller group are EU citizens who are in Sweden without having regulated their status.

It is not evident who has the most secure existence and the best access to children's rights. Among the children designated as EU citizens there are some who have been found begging. They may formally be in Sweden legally if they travel with adults who make use of their freedom of movement – but it may still be that these children want for most things and belong to the most vulnerable.

The strict definitions are misleading in many ways. A large part of the "hidden" who have made contact with *Utanpapper* are not hidden; they live in limbo with an expulsion decision which have not been able to be executed for instance because they lack the documentation required for the country of origin to take them back. The adults in these families are normally subject to work bans and are also not in receipt of economic assistance. This is a category containing thousands of individuals in Sweden but who have yet to be given a name of their own in the debate. Others are actually hidden in the sense that they are avoiding an executable expulsion – but they work, rent accommodation and their children go to school.

In order to be able to categorise at all we have noted the situation the families were in at the first contact. Even so, being an asylum seeker, hidden or undocumented is not a life-long condition, but parts of a migration process. A few of those who have arrived without seeking asylum have been asylum seekers previously. Many of those who were asylum seekers or who had temporary permits when they made contact were soon afterwards facing a final expulsion decision. Others who had been hiding were awarded a new assessment and again became asylum seekers, or were given temporary leave to remain, yet others were rejected again following re-assessment. A few of those who came on a visa and a few of the "undocumented" have applied for asylum – and so on. Some have moved between several countries.

16 children and adolescents have left Sweden during the time they were in contact with *Utanpapper* – and 25 were granted leave to remain. Since most

were only in contact with the project during a couple of weeks more can have been expelled or, conversely, been allowed to stay.

Many of the children without leave to remain have been in Sweden for several years and for the younger children Sweden is often the only country of origin they know.

Example: Please, please...

Carmen is pregnant

"I've come into contact with a girl from Honduras. Carmen is 16 years old. What she tells me is that she lived with her maternal grandparents but they have passed away and she has come to her aunt here in Sweden. The permit solution has not been resolved but it seems to be taking so long because she came here before the permit was ready. She has been allowed to attend school nevertheless. The present emergency is that Carmen is pregnant. She's afraid and she would need to speak to a midwife. But we have discovered that she has to pay the full price which is 1,500 crowns per visit and she hasn't got that kind of money. We daren't think of what the delivery will cost. My question is whether you have any ideas as to how this can be resolved or where we can turn to. Carmen really needs support."

(modified after e-mail from a midwife, first contact)

Please please, help my siblings!

"Hi! The problems I have is for my brother and little sister who still live in P... in that difficult situation. i live here in Karlstad and thatt is good for me but when my father was killed we ran together from the home. my little siblings were separated from us. My mother is whatt is called grandmother for my siblings for my big sisster could not help them when she is dead. Migration Board here has said that children cannot come because they have not mother here. But they are children and cannot do alone in P... They don't know the language. My mother has done everything but no-one has listen. My brother too that he has asthma he needs Medication. I don't know who will be responsible. I wish you can see the difficult situation, I cannot eat and sleep. I wonder my siblings have no right? If something bad happens who takes responsibility? Please please helpp my brother and little sister to come to a country where I can come and take care of my siblings."

(modified from e-mail from big brother/uncle, 17 years old, first contact)

Can you find a family so that I can start school?

"The situation is that we have hidden because the Migration Board has said that we are going home but that won't work. That is why I wonder if you can find a family where I can stay. I finished sixth form and I need to start seventh form now. But I cannot go to school because I'm like illegal. I think that if I am with a Swedish family then they have to let me go to school."

(modified from telephone conversation with a girl, 13 years old, first contact)

Who will protect my children?

"We are in Sweden since three years. We have a daughter who is eight and a boy who is six and God has given us another boy here in Sweden. I have been rejected twice from the Migration. Now Migration has sent our papers to the

police and we only receive money for the children. It is 1,815 crowns per month and there are five of us. I cannot go back to (...) because my life is in danger and who will protect my children? I left to protect them and now I cannot give them a life here. We live in one room at a friend's place, he also has children and there's a lot of arguing. My girl doesn't sleep and it is difficult for her that she's not like the other children. Please ring me."

(modified from e-mail from parent, first contact)

Three problem areas

The concrete reason why you look for help varies and the questions asked often flow into each other. Some of those who have rung have had a single practical question which it has been possible to answer at a single conversation or by referring to some other organisation. Others have needed to talk about different things during a longer period.

The log shows the problems help seekers themselves have brought up and to a certain extent the answers to follow-up questions asked by the advisor¹. Taken together three recurring problem areas can be discerned: Expulsion, family break-up and the children's conditions in the insecure situation.

Expulsion

The single most common problem taken up is that you have been notified of an expulsion order. You want to tell why going back is not an option, that there must have been some kind of mistake, that the authorities have misunderstood, that the lawyer has not listened... More or less desperate hopes are nursed that there nevertheless is a way to make the authorities change their minds but you do not know how. Other questions appear: should one cooperate with the Migration Board, dare one go to the police? Should you hope that it will not be possible to execute the expulsion or should you go into hiding – or is it nevertheless better to let yourself be expelled?

In some of the cases it is not formally a question of a rejection of an application for asylum but of a transfer under the Dublin Regulation, i.e. that you are being sent to a different EU country. Among the unaccompanied children this is the most common problem, often in combination with having been considered adult based on the age stated in a false passport used to travel, or that you have been noted an adult by the police in a different EU country.

In conjunction with the expulsion decision questions regarding rules appear, not just about leave to remain but also about delays for appeal, the possibility of changing representation, rules for detention, lowering of daily allowances, whether you may travel to a different country, limitation periods, etc.

¹ *Some of our calculations over help seekers' problems are founded on statistics relating to all the Sweden contacts. Some of the calculations are – to avoid including too fragmentary information – founded exclusively on contacts which have led to log entries at at least five different occasions. This selection comprises 90 contacts and involves 187 children and young adults.*

For the parents the expulsion rekindles memories of violence and threats suffered in the country of origin and sometimes of how they have been chased from there. Even children can have such memories of their own and be afraid for that reason. But children who have lived for a while in Sweden also have their own conception of the expulsion which is about them being chased from their present homecountry – Sweden.

Family break-up

Another big problem area is family break-up. Striking numbers have made contact because of difficulties in reuniting the family, or that the family faces separation. The rules on family reunification are strict – something which also can be described as the children of refugee families losing the right to their relatives, including parents. This can happen in a number of ways:

- Children who ended up staying in the country of origin may not be reunited with the parents for as long as they are asylum seekers or have temporary leave to remain. This situation can last for several years even though the parents are parties in a completely legal process. If the parents are rejected and remain without permits there are even fewer legal possibilities for family reunification.
- If a parent secures permanent leave to remain a separate application process must be started for the family reunification, something which can take a long time, even if children are automatically prioritised. Family ties are also questioned at this stage. At the same time, the real ties are diluted. Small children forget their parents. Children who turn 18 lose the right to unification. Current practice has it that the relevant age is the age at the time of the decision.
- Criteria for who is considered part of the family are strict. It is not sure that an orphaned child will be allowed to come to the older sibling or the relative who, according to the family's own way of seeing things, would be the best to care for the child. (This is in total opposition with how children who are Swedish citizens are treated if their parents die.)
- Couple formed on the run are separated in conjunction with expulsion. Among these are also families with children where the woman and the man are subject to expulsion orders to different countries, without either of these countries having guaranteed their reunification.
- When a child in a family has turned 18 it can be expelled alone, even if the rest of the family is considered entitled to remain (for example because a parent is in need of protection or a younger child has a connection with Sweden).
- A parent who is arrested can be kept in custody and expelled even if the rest of the family has not been found or cannot be expelled e.g. because of an ongoing process. The same goes for a child who has turned 18.

- Unaccompanied children are normally not allowed to be reunited with the parents in any other way than returning to them – if they can be found. Parents are only allowed to reunite with children in Sweden if the child has been granted leave to remain due to needs for protection, which is unusual.

Among those who have turned to *Utanpapper* there are examples of all of the above situations, from the undocumented boy who has lived in Sweden since he was twelve and who was arrested and taken to the parents' country of origin alone soon after his eighteenth birthday, to the three children between 8 and 11 years old who, on the way to their father in Sweden, were separated from their siblings and ended up alone in a strange country but who for several years were refused entry due to the family ties being questioned.

Around 40 percent of the 470 children and adolescents have experiences of family break-up.

The children's conditions in Sweden

The third big problem area can be summarised as “the children's conditions in Sweden”. However, it could equally well be titled “how the children fare” – or maybe “school, healthcare and social services”. How the children fare and the level of access they have to basic rights are linked. This has become apparent when we have come into contact with adolescents and families who have lived a while in hiding. Many of them have brought up concrete difficulties with access to school or day-care, and access to different forms of care.

It transpires that children as well as adults suffer. It appears already in the conversations that the person ringing is in a mentally bad way. Behind the desire for, e.g., day-care – despite a parent staying at home – is the realisation that the children suffer from the isolation in the home. The parents know that the children need to play with other children and meet other adults.

Small children exhibit symptoms of insecurity such as difficulties sleeping, nightmares and/or bedwetting. They have difficulties with food, they are clingy, a nuisance or detached. Severe mental disturbances which may result in permanent damage also occur. Often the parents are mentally unstable, and that applies also to the young adults. Chronic difficulties such as asthma and tuberculosis occur among children as well as parents.

Several examples have surfaced of children not having received necessary care, for example that they have very bad teeth. Some thirty of the children *Utanpapper* has come to know of are affected, predominantly children staying irregularly in the country without having been asylum seekers (and whose right to care is not dealt with in current legislation). Children who have been asylum seekers shall be given all requisite care according to laws and treaties but they nevertheless may miss out on treatment through not being able to afford getting to the surgery or collect the medication. The fear of the parents may be a problem, as well as the staff's insecurity as to how to deal with a patient without a national insurance number. A further group of children are severely affected by their parents' lack of access to care.

Children not being let into school also occurs, even if it is our impression that most children of school age in fact go to school, especially those who have been asylum seekers.

In many cases it has transpired that the family suffer from a severe lack of money, even if few have asked for financial assistance. The deprivation appears indirectly through information on what the children get to eat, living in basements and summer cottages, difficulties travelling farther than one would normally travel on foot, etc.

For some twenty children and young adults the log contains notes on us hearing of suspicions of violence or abuse, either from the child itself or from someone in the family or via reports made to social services. All such cases are of course not necessarily related to the situation of irregularity even if violence to children can be assumed to be more common among families under severe pressure.

Unlike – and alike

The categories merge by virtue of having different statuses within the family and by virtue of the same individuals changing status over time, as described above. But the categories also merge by virtue of individuals of different status can live in similar ways. Adolescents and parents who have arrived illegally work irregularly to survive but so do adolescents and parents who have fled here and are in hiding to avoid expulsion. Others who have been given final rejections continue to live as when they were asylum seekers waiting for an expulsion which it is not certain when or even whether it can be executed.

Working irregularly is not to be interpreted as making good money through avoiding tax. To the extent it has come across in conversation how adolescents and parents make a living without a legal income, it is a matter of working for very low wages and without guarantees. In the countryside it can be picking berries and different odd-jobs like repair work or painting. In the big cities you work illegally in restaurants and with cleaning, or handing out flyers or newspapers. A few children help to support the family. Young adults who are in hiding/undocumented work a lot. Even asylum seekers often live off very little and sometimes crammed together in a similar way to families in hiding, the whole family in the same room.

For the adolescents the seclusion from studies and labour market and from the possibility to found a family are big causes for concern. Some are afraid of adults in their surroundings, that they will be abused or beaten. A few have already suffered it.

School children who have been in Sweden a long time often say that Sweden is their country, they study and think about the future. At the same time they express feelings of difference and seclusion. A few of them suffer bullying in school because friends know that they do not have leave to remain. A few live in very unsafe family circumstances. Fear of other adults in the surroundings is however not mentioned in the same way as by the young adults. On the other hand, many school children are afraid of being arrested and expelled. Many worry about how their parents feel, and a few of them take on a lot of

responsibility for the family. In separated families, the thoughts of siblings can be imposing.

The thing most have in common is precisely the insecurity. The children may not understand their legal status, and nor may the parents. But they know – at least if they are of school age – which their status is *not*. They know that they do not have the safe family situation others enjoy. They know they are not safe. Parents are unsafe and they themselves are unsafe.

Considering that the site invited all “children without proper papers” to make contact it is not strange that those who seized the opportunity belonged to different categories. The number of asylum seekers was not large considering the size of that group. Each and every one who made contact had their reasons. One lesson is that the need for support could be similar irrespective of the children’s formal category.

We can conclude that from the children’s perspective it is not very propitious to separate asylum seekers, hidden and undocumented. Those children and adolescents we have made contact with, irrespective of their formal status, live under a very real threat of rejection in every sense of the word: the break-up of the family, seclusion from society, not feeling security and belonging like other children.

Example: Sirwe could not speak

Sirwe was a little girl, only 2½ years old, whose parents rang our helpline because they wanted help finding a day-care place for Sirwe. The parents, who came from a middle eastern country, had applied for asylum but when their application was rejected they hid because the father would have risked his life if he returned. Sirwe was born in Sweden and the mother took care of her while the father worked, otherwise they both helped out. The parents soon noticed that Sirwe was not like other children. She never learned any words, but only expressed herself by “noises”, she did not look them in the eyes, she did not cry when she hurt herself. The parents thought that it was their “fault”; that it was because of them living in hiding that she was not like other children, that it was because they were worried and sad that she was difficult to contact. That was why they wanted their girl to go to day-care, in order for her to spend time with other children and adults.

But Sirwe turned out to be very late in her development, corresponding to an autism diagnosis. In order to help a child with autism an intensive and long-term treatment must be started as soon as possible as the child’s brain changes rapidly during the pre-school years. Otherwise the child risks not being able adequately to relate to other human beings, not developing a language and the future quality of life can be irretrievably affected. But because Sirwe and her parents lived in hiding they had no contact either with child health care or childcare where you would normally discover the child’s symptoms and refer for inquiries and treatment to the child psychiatry services.

Sirwe and her parents came to the Save the Children Centre for children and adolescents in crisis where they met with a child therapist and a paediatrician.

The parents told about Sirwe. She does not sleep at night, she does not eat much, she gets fed but she does not gain weight, she does not talk, it is difficult to establish contact with her, it is difficult to understand what she wants and she often has a cold. The parents are exhausted and very worried. De-identified case description from Monica Brendler-Lindqvist, certified psychotherapist.

2. Why undocumented?

When the *Utanpapper* project started in March 2006 the number of children in hiding was unusually low. Many children who were subject to expulsion decisions had recently been offered the possibility of a new assessment under a temporary law. Many of them had been given permanent leave to remain, others were still waiting to hear. Today, some two years later, the number of undocumented children seems to have increased. This section deals with the reasons for this – and the possible number of children concerned. The examples which occur have been modified to prevent the identification of the children.

During some months in the winter of 2005-2006 a temporary law was in effect in Sweden which gave individuals subject to removal- or expulsion decisions the possibility of a new assessment. It was a transitional law in preparation for the new Aliens Act which came into force on 31 March 2006. No fewer than 31,000 individuals had their cases reviewed under the temporary law. They were all subject to expulsion decisions. However, only 8,000 of them had lived in hiding, of whom approximately 1,500 children.²

Not all who were re-assessed were granted leave to remain – approximately 13,000 individuals were left over, of whom approximately 1,500 children. Among those who had turned to *Utanpapper* there are children who had lived in hiding before as well as after the temporary law but we do not know how many ended up leaving the country and how many stayed.

Another indication on the number of former asylum seekers who live in hiding is the police figures over individuals subject to warrants for avoiding a removal- or expulsion decision. Around mid-2008, that number was approximately 7,500 of whom approximately 650 were children. However, this number does not include the warrants which have been written off due to the four year statute of limitation, or expelled individuals who have returned without resubmitting an application for asylum. On the other hand, some of in respect of whom warrants are out may have left the country without telling the police.

The numbers from the temporary law and the number of individuals in respect of whom warrants have been issued due to expulsion decisions are different ways of estimating the number of undocumented individuals there are who have been asylum seekers. It is more difficult to calculate the number of individuals who have entered the country without a permit and without applying for leave to remain. Nor are those who have entered with a visa or

² Rounded figures from the Migration Board statistics for October 2006. Those who were not in hiding lived in the open with expulsion decisions that could not be executed, or had had their decisions recently. Of the 31,000 who reported in 13,000 were granted permanent leave to remain, of whom approximately 4,000 children. Temporary leave to remain was granted to approximately 4,000 individuals of whom approximately 1,000 children.

from exempted countries and who have stayed on without applying for leave to remain registered.

A common guess is that the undocumented individuals who have not been asylum seekers amount to approximately 20,000 individuals³. The organisation 'dennaonsdag' [= thiswednesday] which was started by undocumented estimate that the former asylum seekers constitute a significant proportion of the undocumented and that together, both groups amount to approximately 25,000 – 30,000⁴.

Many of the undocumented who have come to work are probably single or parents who have left the children in the country of origin. But through those who have turned to the helpline we know that there are children in this group also.

The reason so many had their cases reviewed under the temporary law despite not being in hiding was that many lived under expulsion decisions which could not be executed. This "grey zone" remains. Midway through 2008 there were approximately 8,000 individuals in the reception system at the Migration Board with unexecuted final expulsion decisions. Approximately 4,000 individuals had had their cases turned over to the police for execution but were not subject to warrants⁵. We do not know how many of the expulsions will be executed but judging by the Migration Board prognosis it should be around one half.

Yet another difficult to evaluate group is constituted by those who have overstayed their temporary leave to remain. These are undocumented even if some of them live openly with normal employment or own businesses. Since these individuals themselves take responsibility for leaving the country or re-applying for leave to remain their number is difficult to calculate. Many of them are adolescents and families who were granted temporary leave to remain under the temporary law⁶.

That there are more asylum seekers who live more or less openly with non-executed decisions than those who are the subject of warrants is related to the

³ See Kristina Mattsson, "De papperslösa och de aningslösa" [= *The undocumented and the unsuspecting*], Leopard förlag 2008.

⁴ Anna Holmgren "RITA – Rättvis ingång till arbete" [= *Fair entry to work*], Fastighetsanställdas förbund 2008.

⁵ There is a degree of overlap between those who appear in the Department of Migration reception system and those whose cases have been turned over to the police, since turning over to the police may occur even in the absence of avoidance from the Department of Migration.

⁶ Most of the temporary leaves to remain under the temporary law expired during 2007. Some individuals have since left the country, others have been granted permanent leave to remain, some are re-applying again. How many remain undocumented is unknown. Others with temporary leave to remain are students and individuals in precarious employment. According to an interview with Roy Melcher at Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting [= *collective association for local and regional government*] in Blekinge Läns Tidning of 14 August 2008 there were at that time approximately 3,000 individuals living in the municipalities with expired temporary leaves to remain.

fact that it is difficult to execute expulsions to countries of escape such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

All in all, these appreciations lead to the conclusion that approximately 1,000 – 1,500 undocumented children live “submerged” in Sweden today and as many again are in the risk zone – they are undocumented but live in the open. Young adults and those children who live in insecurity because of parents or siblings who are under threat of expulsion or who are not allowed to be reunited are not included in these figures.

The insufficient reasons

It has been apparent that the number of children in hiding has increased during the period that the helpline was kept open. Every month, “new” adolescents and families with expulsion decisions have made contact with *Utanpapper*. At first there were mainly those who for one reason or another had not been included in the temporary law but had been given a new expulsion decision. After that expulsion decisions under the new Aliens Act have started to be made and as a consequence again individuals who go into hiding – at the same time as the possibilities of a new chance following a final decision have decreased with the new Act. Among those who stay away there are also some who are the subject of transfer decisions to another EU country under the Dublin Regulation.

There were hopes that the new Alien Act would bring with it better grounding and even acceptance of decisions by virtue of them nowadays being the subject of court oversight. These hopes would seem to have been confounded. Those who made contact with *Utanpapper* immediately after an expulsion decision were distraught, felt violated and distrusted. The conversations were often about helping individuals understand that the judgment is final and to accept the situation they will find themselves in if they do not follow the ruling.

It also needs to be said that an expulsion decision with respect to a family with children who has suffered persecution or threats of persecution does not necessarily imply that the children have not been heard or that the parents have not been believed. The definition of need for protection under the law is not about what you have been through but about the risk for persecution in future. Many expulsion decisions are based on the fact that while the story has not been doubted, it has been held that the asylum seekers could seek protection from the authorities in the country of origin or in another country. This relates to children as well as adults.

Save the Children have issued three reports on the assessment of children's grounds for asylum⁷. In the latest, *Nytt system, gamla brister?* the treatment of the grounds of 100 children by the Migration Board and the courts since the entry into force of the new Aliens Act is scrutinised. It transpired that a large

⁷ Karin Juhlén “Barns egna asylskäl 2003” [= *Children's own grounds for asylum*], *Rädda Barnen 2003*. Eva Rimsten “Barns egna asylskäl 2005”, *Rädda Barnen 2005*. Lars Olsson “Nytt system, gamla brister?” [= *New system, old failings?*], *Rädda Barnen 2008*.

proportion of the children had grounds which ought to be treated as need for protection in a legal sense, i.e. that they were concerned with e.g. the risk of suffering persecution or abuse. But even if grounds which related to a need for protection were mentioned in the asylum file, these were not always included in the assessment of the children's cases itself.

According to the survey, when the children are granted leave to remain it is mostly on the grounds of "exceptionally distressing circumstances", for example health reasons or the adaptation to Sweden. When refugee status or need for protection were recognised it was the family's common grounds which were the deciding factor. However, two out of nine unaccompanied children included were granted leave to remain as "otherwise in need of protection".

The report specifically scrutinises the grounds specific to children. That includes risk of child abuse, prevention from going to school, violations of children in mixed marriages, risk of recruitment as a child soldier or street child. Risk of kidnapping, forced labour, genital mutilation, forced marriage are other examples. Grounds specific to children existed in 30 out of 58 cases (family units). Despite this, in no case have grounds specific to children constituted the basis for a leave to remain as a refugee. The grounds specific to children were treated more in depth in the assessment of distressing circumstances than at the assessment of need for protection⁸.

The Save the Children lawyer Lars Olsson commented in summary:

Many of the grounds specific to children which have appeared through the survey are of a very serious nature, and the fact that none of them have founded a leave to remain for refugee status is indicative that central aspects of the Swedish asylum process remain unchanged. The fundamental and remaining problem is that children's rights are not understood nor taken seriously. This can lead to violations of Sweden's international obligations, but also to catastrophic consequences for the children seeking asylum in Sweden.

In May 2008 the Red Cross published a report on the results of the 2005 Aliens Act⁹ which among other things showed that the Migration Appeal Court adopts a strict interpretation of the Act's provisions on need for protection. This becomes apparent not least in the assessment of the type of protection individuals having fled from civil wars or other difficult conflicts in the country of origin need. The strict definition of what constitutes civil war adopted by the Migration Appeal Court entails that those fleeing need to show that they are personally subject to "severe adversity". At the same time difficult circumstances of internal flight are not exceptionally distressing circumstances – nor are they normally sufficient to constitute need for protection. Taken together, according to the Red Cross, the practice in these matters means that few asylum seekers from troubled countries are deemed to

⁸ The report gives the example that a child's trauma is only considered a pressing circumstance despite the trauma having appeared when the child witnessed violence.

⁹ Rebecca Stern "Ny utlänningslag under lupp" [= Scrutiny of new Aliens Act], Röda Korset 2008.

have a need for protection. The report also points to the fact that the authorities seem to be making decisions based on imperfect country information.

It should be pointed out though that both reports express the view that the new procedure for asylum cases is clearer and more predictable than the old.

Utanpapper has not had the ambition to enquire into why individuals leave their countries of origin or why asylum applications are rejected. The information gathered systematically concerns the children's situation when they are in Sweden without papers. We therefore cannot produce an own analysis of asylum policy. However, we can see that some of the stories that have been imparted to us confirm the observations in both reports.

An example of this is the observation that children's grounds for asylum rarely appear in the authorities' assessments. In one case we saw that a child almost per definition was not deemed to be in need of protection despite already having been imprisoned and tortured. This is an extreme example, but children having grounds remain invisible in an asylum case is common. This was described as follows in the first annual report from *Utanpapper*:

“Some of the families we meet are on the run from direct personal persecution or from full blown war. Others come from countries in a post war situation, internal conflicts or continued oppression. The situation is rarely sufficiently serious for an asylum seeker generally to be deemed in need of protection in another country. At the same time the individual or the family may suffer from individual complications making the situation more complex. One family is in conflict with a local commander who has killed the father and now threatens the oldest boys. Another family perseveres in a mixed marriage which is ill-seen and suffers harassment affecting the children. In a third family a child is subject to honour related threats – and so on. The Swedish authorities makes a general assessment that those who have problems can seek protection in their country of origin from the state or the own group. But for these families with their individual complications, that does not work. The family's specific problems and low status in their own group means that they do not trust the protection in the country of origin to be sufficient for them. Such individual complications are, however, rarely deemed sufficient for asylum in and of themselves – and it is not certain that they even appear in the asylum case. For the family they are everything; they affect the children and mean that the family find it impossible to return.”

Example: The ruling did not deal with Sara

Sara is eighteen months old. Her parents Aran and Natasja met at the refugee centre. Natasja came to Sweden with her family who belongs to a minority in an ex-Soviet republic. Her parents were allowed to stay under the temporary law but in the meantime Natasja had turned 18. During the wait she met Aran, who is also an asylum seeker but from a completely different country. Sara is registered on Aran's passport and now all three of them are set to be expelled to Aran's country of origin. But Natasja does not want to be forced to convert to Islam and in order to marry and Aran knows that 90 percent of

girls suffer genital mutilation in his country of origin. Aran does not think he will be able to protect his family. He has no say in his family and he may be imprisoned. Natasja e-mailed *Utanspapper* when her application for asylum had been rejected and the lawyer did not seem interested. Later we ring her up and speak to her directly.

When we get to read the papers it turns out that the assessment in the asylum case centres on matters completely different from the ones Natasja has told us about. Natasja's parents' grounds for asylum are dealt with and why they do not pertain to her. Regarding Aran, the papers say that he earlier absconded from military service and therefore possibly risks punishment, in addition to two years' of military service, but he is not deemed in risk of unreasonable punishment. According to the Migration Board and the Court, Natasja will be allowed to visit Aran and if they only get married she will also be granted leave to remain in his country of origin.

Natasja's fears for Sara are not at all considered in the ruling. The risk of genital mutilation is not mentioned. The problem that Aran may not be allowed to marry a person of no religion is not touched upon, even less what will happen should they persist in claiming their right to continue to live together without getting married. Consequently, the risk of permanent family break-up is not dealt with, nor the problem of who will be given custody of Sara should Aran end up in prison.

The refugee's catch 22

The flight situation itself can appear in the decisions of the authorities as an indication that the child or the family does not need protection. Examples of this are when a family has been unable to fly with all the children, for financial reasons or due to an unwillingness to subject the children to the dangerous journey with smugglers. The fact that they have "left" a child behind can then be relied on by the Migration Board as an argument that the situation in the country of origin was not as difficult for the children as the parents have stated.

We found similar reasoning in a decision concerning a sixteen year old who had applied to be reunited with a relative in Sweden as he had lost his parents. The relative had tried to apply on behalf of the boy, but had been informed that he himself had to go to a neighbouring country where there was a Swedish embassy and apply from there. The boy had done so and now lived undocumented in the capital of the neighbouring country selling pens in the street. The existence as a street child was described in the decision rejecting the application as the boy "making a living as a vendor" – consequently, according to the Migration Board, he was in no need to come to the adult relative. The boy had his own reasons not to want to return to the country of origin. However, these reasons were without importance since, under Swedish law, grounds for asylum cannot result in a leave to remain if you have not already made it to Sweden. But you cannot obtain an entry visa in order to apply for asylum.

As a result of rules and interpretations like these children may be put in a catch 22 situation. The boy must go to the embassy in order to be able to apply for leave to remain – but if he succeeds that is taken as evidence that he manages on his own. He was left with a choice between staying in the neighbouring country without papers – or subjecting himself to the risk involved in going to Sweden on his own with the help of smugglers, in order to apply for asylum here.

Refugees being left to the smugglers' market also leads to the travel route being decided on by smugglers and travel documents often being forged – or discarded at the smugglers' insistence. The fact that the asylum seeker appears without identity and travel documents can understandably lead to suspicions in the country of destination – and ultimately their application being rejected.

Some adolescents and families who have made contact with *Utanpapper* have ended up in unreasonable situations when all the documentation they try to produce is dismissed as insufficient. At the same time the identity documents are necessary in order to be believed in the asylum process. The catch 22 situation is even clearer when the lack of recognised identity documents can make it impossible for the expelled person to start afresh, for example by marrying in Sweden, or applying for leave to remain on the basis of running an own business or employment, or even returning to the country of origin.

The fact that there is no legal way to travel for the individual who needs to apply for asylum is a general problem with the asylum policy of the EU countries which has been pointed to by the UNHCR and other organisations and even by the European Commission. What is special in our description here is how this circumstance leads to family break-up and is even turned into an argument against the children's need for protection.

“Dublin cases” and age assessments

All asylum seekers who have gone into hiding have not had decisions on expulsion to the country of origin. Among the hidden there are nowadays a good number who are avoiding transfer to a different EU country. It may be an EU country who had issued a Schengen visa used to travel or which they have already passed through. In many cases this will be Greece, a country feared among asylum seekers because of the inexistent support awarded to asylum seekers and the many testimonies of abuse and undignified treatment, while the possibility of being granted asylum is microscopic¹⁰.

Several designated representatives and other adults who work with unaccompanied children have turned to *Utanpapper* to raise the alarm about adolescents who by all accounts have not turned 18 in respect of whom a decision of transfer to an EU country where they will not be treated like children nevertheless has been made. Some cases have concerned teenagers who were about to be returned to Greece despite having suffered violence at

¹⁰ See “Position on the Return of Asylum-seekers to Greece under the Dublin Regulation” UNHCR 08-04-15 and “Et uverdigg sjansespell om asyl i Europa” [= an undignified game of chance on asylum in Europe], NOAS 08-04-09.

the hands of Greek police. But it has also been about transfers to other EU countries which have caused alarm as they have concerned children who have already spent several years on the run in several countries, children who have been traumatised by events in the country of origin and during the flight or children who have already spent time on the street in the country to which they are being sent.

The Dublin Regulation, which governs which EU country is responsible for the assessment of an asylum application, makes an exception for unaccompanied children. Their applications should normally be assessed in the country where they have relations or where they submit their application. The most common reasons we have come across for children nevertheless being the subjects of transfer decisions is that an asylum assessment is deemed to have been begun in the other country or that an age assessment has been made in accordance with the “principle of first country of asylum”. This can mean that the child has travelled on a false passport disclosing a higher age or that the border authorities in a different country on more or less strong grounds have decided that a teenager is above 18. It may also be that the smuggler has told the child to state that he or she is an adult, for example to be entitled to work.

The UNHCR has pleaded with the EU countries not to return asylum seekers to Greece. Sweden has acceded to this pleading but only in relation to unaccompanied children, which means that families with children can be sent to Greece, as can the teenager who has been deemed an adult by the Greek police.

The Migration Board guidelines for the circumstances in which a stated age may be changed are relatively strict (which may lead to a different problem, namely that adults are placed in youth residences). However, an age entered onto the child’s documents in another EU country is not deemed changed. An age assessment made by Migration Board officers in Sweden is a service note and cannot be appealed, despite its serious consequences in law. On the other hand, the officer may change the assessment him or herself and make a new service note, something which has happened in some cases. The individual who has been deemed over 18 is not admissible to youth residence, will not be given a designated representative, may be refused access to school, will not be given access to care beyond emergency care, and so on.

The support persons who have contacted us regarding age assessments have in most cases been experienced individuals with knowledge of the age problems and the fact that adults may have reasons to state that they are children. But they have reacted when adolescents who genuinely have looked like children and behaved like children have been branded as adults and left without support. Documentation such as identity documents and medical certificates from the country of origin has been dismissed. In one case *Utanpapper* retained paediatrician Anders Hjern, who has also acted as the National Board of Health and Welfare’s expert on age assessments of children. His assessment showed that all the factors surveyed, including x-rays, indicated that it could be

true that the boy was 15 when he arrived in Sweden, as he himself said. Nothing indicated that he was 22 as his fake passport said.

The reception of unaccompanied children has been criticised in some municipalities. But in the municipalities there will at least be friends and at best adults you can trust. To be ejected from there and from school can be a disaster for a young person who has just started to adapt to the security.

Age assessments can also become relevant in the asylum case itself. The individual who has been deemed adult may be sent back to the country of origin even if there is now relative to receive him or her. If there are exceptionally distressing circumstances in favour of staying in Sweden, for an adult these need to be more significant in order to lead to leave to remain.

The impossible choice

We cannot provide a complete answer to why children whose applications have been rejected end up staying in Sweden but the factors mentioned above may constitute part of the explanation. The asylum seekers' grounds fall outside of the framework required by the Migration Board and the courts' practice in order to be granted leave to remain, but for the individuals these nevertheless constituted strong reasons to leave the country of origin, and the fear of what would happen if they returned is too great. At the same time an extended stay may have turned Sweden into a new home country for the children/adolescents from which they absolutely do not wish to be forced.

To all this need to be added the cultural aspects: the fact that the asylum seeker does not understand the procedure and what is required, that the public representative has not been available or made him- or herself understood, that it has not been understood what can be demanded (for example the right to be interviewed by a female officer or to an oral hearing) or who to turn to and who has authority to make a difference.

For children who have never been asylum seekers the background is usually that the parents or they themselves have entered the country on a visitor's visa or from an exempted country. Among those with whom we have been in contact, who do not consider themselves refugees, some have chosen to go back as they, for instance, have discovered the difficulties that will follow when the children grow older. But for others an attachment has formed through work or family formation making the option to return increasingly unattractive or that it would mean breaking up the family. It can of course also be the case that the existence in the country of origin is expected to be a worse alternative for the children than undocumented existence in Sweden, even if you do not consider yourself a refugee.

An important perspective relates to the observations we have *not* made. In the entire material made up of 310 contacts from Sweden concerning 470 children and young adults there is not a single one where the problem has been "I don't want to be here! Help me return!" despite the information on the web site and other promotional material not precluding the child wanting to leave Sweden or, for example, wanting help against abuse by an adult.

At the same time, the question of leave to remain has been ever-present. Among the families we have made notes of at at least five occasions, the threat of expulsion or family break-up or both appears as a problem for almost everyone, irrespective of the concrete reason for making contact.

There is nothing whatsoever in our material to indicate that the adolescents and families concerned have chosen to live undocumented, for instance in order to avoid fees and taxes or in order to escape justice. The reason for not having papers is not choice but that they have been unobtainable.

We can also see that the choice is not always between hiding undocumented in Sweden and enjoying civic rights in the country of origin. Even disregarding the fact that many claim that they will not have access to their rights due to harassment, it is still the case that all are not recognised citizens of any country. It may be that they belong to an ethnicity which has ended up on the wrong side of a border or who have had their citizenships withdrawn in conjunction with a conflict. Some lived in hiding due to conflicts already in the country of origin. A special situation we have come across in some ten cases is when a child has been born in Sweden while the family lived undocumented. Such a child risks statelessness and not being recognised in the country of origin either.

We also see that unaccompanied children whose applications have been rejected face an acute risk of becoming undocumented young adults. As far as Sweden is concerned, their asylum case is closed but for the adolescents the situation which drove them away from the country of origin and the family remains unresolved. That is why they end up staying in Sweden or another country, despite the possibility of a restricted life without leave to remain. In the cases where we have managed to ascertain what has happened to unaccompanied adolescents with whom we have been in contact or heard about and whose applications have been rejected, most seem to have ended up in an insecure existence as undocumented in Sweden or another country, or making renewed attempts to apply for asylum.

During 2008 the share of unaccompanied children whose applications are rejected has increased and the Migration Board has adopted a new practice whereby minors can be expelled even if there are no relatives to receive them in the country of origin. There is every reason to be attentive to where these children end up.

Everyone does not have equally strong reasons for avoiding the country of origin. But even for those who have not been asylum seekers it constitutes the best option, or rather the least bad. The background is the pressing need to make a living or the need for protection by adult relations. For some who have been asylum seekers it is rather an impossible choice, a non-choice. It feels impossible to return and therefore you stay even though that too is impossible. Everything is problematic – but the biggest problem is the threat of expulsion and the strongest dream is that of leave to remain.

Example: Does Rahman dare return?

Rahman hails from an Asian country. His parents are members of an opposition party and have been imprisoned after being accused of insulting the president. For Rahman it is obvious to follow in their footsteps and continue the fight despite not being very involved with the cause. To him it was enough knowing that the regime had imprisoned his parents. He made a living by selling bread in a railway station. He had only spent a year or so in school and when, as a fifteen year old, he helped distributing a banned newspaper he could barely read what it said. The police discovered him and he spent three months in prison.

When Rahman is to talk about the time in prison during the asylum interview he has difficulties. According to the protocol he is crying saying that he cannot. In the end he says he was beaten about once a week. Those who beat him used to ask who had written in the newspaper. He said that he did not know and then he was beaten until he lost consciousness. Once when he asked to see a doctor because he was afraid of what had happened to his head, the violence precisely to the head increased. He was released after three months but a police in the home town was appointed as his supervisor.

The treatment Rahman describes, being abused by persons in positions of authority in order to be made to divulge information during questioning, is called torture. Strikes to the bottom of the feet, which he relates, are a common method of torture. Rahman has injuries which have been investigated in Sweden. No one in Sweden has questioned whether Rahman has in fact suffered the violence. Even so, his asylum application was rejected. The reasoning of the Migration Board was that Rahman was so young and knew so little about the party that he could hardly be of interest to the authorities in the country of origin. Admittedly he had spent time in prison, but according to the Migration Board that was because he was to be questioned in relation to others. The newspaper writers, not him, was who the authorities were interested in.

To Rahman, why he was beaten is not very important. He cannot believe that the authorities in the home country would cease to be interested in him. That was also the view of his grandfather who had helped him leave the country. Rahman's lawyer requested an oral hearing in the Migration Court but this was refused. The Court accepted the reasoning of the Migration Board and confirmed the expulsion decision. The Migration Board of Appeal did not grant leave to appeal. Thus the reasoning of the Migration Court was not tried in the highest instance: Should a child who has suffered torture be deemed not to risk anything on return simply because he is a child?

In Sweden Rahman has studied as much as he has been able to and he speaks fluent Swedish. He is seventeen years old as this is written. Thinking of the expulsion being executed scares him a lot even if he hopes that the country of origin will refuse to receive him. He has contacted several help organisations. Thus far no one has seen any possibility of affecting the expulsion decision.

3. What can be done?

In the first chapter three problem areas which had been brought up by those who seek help in Sweden were mentioned: Expulsion, family break-up and the children's conditions in Sweden. This section deals with how we have worked in order to attack these problems and to try to support the approximately 470 children and young adults we have been in contact with, and also respond to the 283 e-mails received from abroad. The case descriptions in the section have been modified to prevent identification.

Most e-mails and phone calls to *Utanpapper* were answered by a team consisting of three persons with different competences: Sanna Vestin, Mario Morrone and from December 2006 Tyko Granberger¹¹. Initially, staffing corresponded to one full-time position. From December 2006, this was increased to two full-time positions.

The activity was completely dominated by the contacts made in Sweden. Also this section is mainly about these contacts. But even e-mails from abroad were answered and we will start with a few words about them.

Standard replies to foreign contacts

The largest number of the e-mails from abroad were written in Arabic, but some were written in Spanish, English, Russian, French or Swedish. The project hired a translator and an interpreter who read the Arab correspondence one day per week. A smaller number of letters received personal replies, but the large majority were sent one of the standard replies in Arabic which were elaborated with time.

The most common of the standard replies for abroad were the general replies containing basic information on entry rules and rules on asylum and rules on studies and work in Sweden respectively, as well as rules on family reunification. For Iraqis and Palestinians there were special standard replies containing a short explanation of Swedish asylum practice for these nationalities. (These were adjusted as and when practice changed.) Most of the standard replies contained relatively cooling formulations about the difficulties being granted leave to remain in Sweden and about the Dublin rules. The intention was to provide realistic information of a kind which is otherwise difficult to come by abroad.

When the need arose, a new letter was formulated which could be used as a standard reply to certain questions, for instance on visa rules and the possibility of being granted leave to remain on health care grounds.

¹¹ Sanna Vestin is a journalist, former editor of the *Artikel 14* magazine, author of among other things *Flyktingfällan* [= the Refugee trap], *Ordfront* 2006. Mario Morrone is a certified psychotherapist with long therapeutic experience. Tyko Granberger has a Masters in International Relations and has worked with youth projects.

Because of the standard replies, the work with the foreign contacts took up little time in relation to their numbers. A few contacts concerning children in special situations, most often with a link to Sweden, led to continued contact in a similar manner as the contacts made from Sweden.

Personal support for Swedish contacts

The contacts made by someone in Sweden were often initiated by a short telephone conversation which involved either us trying to provide an answer directly or – if further conversations and efforts seemed necessary – making an appointment for a new conversation, possibly involving an interpreter. In a roughly similar way the e-mails were answered either with immediate information or with completing questions and possibly an offer of telephone contact.

At the first longer conversation two of the team members were often present in order to help each other decide what seems to be the main problem, whether to continue working on this case and, if so, how – or whether we ought to try to direct to someone else who is in the child's vicinity or who has a better view of the problem. After this conversation one team member has tended to be overall responsible for the continued contact with the child or the family, even if we have had recurring meetings where we have discussed perspectives and difficulties.

Of the young adults most maintained contact with the team at *Utanpapper* themselves, directly or via their partners – many of the young adults were couples facing break-up through expulsion. Of the approximately 30 unaccompanied children around one third maintained the contact themselves, whilst the rest were represented by a support person. Out of approximately 200 families with children there were around 25 where we were only in contact with a child, or where we for the most part spoke to a child.

In the majority of cases an adult maintained contact, approximately equally frequently a parent as someone outside the family. The support person outside the family is someone who has seen the children and been worried about them; a school nurse, a rector, an employee at the youth residence, a designated representative, a neighbour, a friend...

If instead you consider the amount of notes in the project's logbook in relation to different children – i.e. how much time we have spent on them – the image is completely different. Direct contacts with children and young adults are those which most often developed into extended contacts, and which thereby have influenced the project. Even some parents have been in recurring contact with the project for an extended period. The contacts made by a support person outside the family more often involved a single question, or requests for advice on how to proceed to help a child or a family in a particular situation. After a short discussion the support person has been given the information requested, or a referral to some other organisation. The same thing has tended to happen when a childless adult has asked a question on his or her own behalf.

A lifeline – not a lasso

Within Save the Children, *Utanpapper* was referred to as “the lifeline”. That is a name which commits. Launching a helpline means shouldering a responsibility. In order to receive help the individual in need certainly has to take an initiative, grip the lifeline, want something. But after that there has to be someone in the boat holding on and receiving.

The image of the lifeline implies a heavy commitment from those who run it – but it is also delicate. It is a common experience within social work that adults benefit from taking responsibility, and that it can be disadvantageous for a support person to take over responsibility. No one feels good about being treated as a helpless victim. This has been a recurring topic of conversation within the *Utanpapper*-team. When it comes to children and adolescents the balancing can be more difficult than for adults. Children do not either benefit from being treated as victims – but nor should they have to shoulder the same responsibilities as adults.

For individuals who live undocumented a further aspect is added. Many are severely isolated and are forced to be responsible for the own lives *in absurdum*. If you are already forced to be your own dentist or to raise your children without contact with other people, further individual strengthening and sense of responsibility may not be your prime need, at any rate not without participation in a social context.

These considerations have led to discussions within the team around which task we should take upon us for each individual adolescent or family. Should we offer to make contact with an authority or should we limit ourselves to providing advice? Should we ring back to ask how it went? Should we ask to read documents and make contact with the lawyer? Should we questions the parents' views on the needs of the child?

Making these choices has sometimes been difficult. On the other hand, our perspective on the illegality of the situation has not been a problem within the team. It is the starting point of the project that even undocumented individuals have rights. We would not have been much support to those who came to us for help if we had started contacts by questioning their being in Sweden at all. If they have come here as children it is in any case not their responsibility.

This is also a question of trust. In order to get through to the children or the parents we need to earn their trust by not being a government authority, by not turning them in, by being prepared to talk on their terms about their problems, whether that problem was football practice or the need for a torture investigation.

Save the Children did not open the helpline in order to deal with the problem society has with undocumented children. It was the other way around: The intention was to ascertain which problems the children have with society. It was a lifeline, not a lasso.

Having tried to deal with the children and their parents respectfully and to start from their perspective and their questions does not mean that more difficult problems could not be discussed. When trust had been established, when the person seeking help is certain that the support person is actually listening (and will not ring the police) – then that trust may be sufficient to provide support at another stage, whether the family has made the choice to go into hiding or to dare return.

Example: Big sister has died

A family from a country in Latin America arrived in Sweden with their three children, Dafina 13, Daniel 11 and Milos 8. The hope was that the eldest daughter who was suffering from a far-progressed blood disease could be treated in Sweden. But it was not enough, the daughter died and now the family is to be expelled. The mother suffers from cancer, but is deemed treatable in the country of origin. They are all in a bad way psychologically and in conjunction with the daughter's funeral the father has suffered a heart attack. The children suffer from sleeping and eating difficulties. The parents feel that the boys blame them for having caused the death of their big sister by coming to Sweden. When they make contact with *Utanpapper* they have just been directed to move to a transit centre in view of the return journey a few days later.

The sons do not want to leave the location of their big sister's burial. Since the family has sold all they had in order to come to Sweden they have very little to return to. At the same time it is obvious that even if the expulsion is near the predominant difficulties are the death of the big sister and the parents' illness and wavering care.

Our support work at first consists of talking to the paternal grandparents who live in Sweden and have taken care of the children during their stay. Grandpa relates that parents and children cannot stand each other. When the family moves to the centre the situation worsens. After a long conversation we agree that the best thing would be if the children could stay with the grandparents, even if the expulsion is near. We speak to the parents, the staff at the centre and others concerned at the Migration Board so that all are informed.

When the boys are back the conversations start to be about how the grandparents are to support them in their grief. They would very much like to visit the grave and after advice from Save the Children's Grieving Children-team we provide some advice on simple ceremonies they can perform, such as taking some earth as a memento. Grandma later relates that the visit had been difficult but also nice. Afterwards the children had set up a little remembrance altar with a picture of the sister.

We speak to the father and look for a health care contact to have his heart examined. A surgery for undocumented individuals organises for him to see a heart specialist. It transpires that his state of health requires monitoring, but it is not so bad as to constitute a bar to expulsion. Now follow conversations

with several people at the Migration Board. The officer in charge of reception thinks the expulsion is a tragedy but there is no legal bar and the asylum officer is keen on a swift execution. The grandparents want the option of adopting should the worst happen – the death of both parents – and we investigate what would be involved in such a procedure. We also find out what possibilities exist for re-visits – it can be difficult since the family has applied for asylum and been rejected.

The next day the expulsion has been executed. According to grandma the family is in a temporary residence for seasonal workers in the country of origin. This conversation, when we reasoned around what had happened and the children's future, became the last contact. Despite the sadness of the situation it was a good conversation around our efforts to see to the best of the children in a difficult situation, and how the grandparents would maintain contact in the future.

Turning problems around

We have generally been unable to resolve those problems relating to expulsion and family break-up, i.e. the very fact that you have no papers, even if there are a few exceptions. In a few rare cases our efforts have had a determinate impact, in others we have been able to contribute to a solution, not least by clarifying the child's situation to decision makers and in some cases by funding a lawyer or a medical investigation.

It is probable that there are help seekers or support persons who have been disappointed that we were unable to solve the problems. Maybe Save the Children ended up on one or other list of "all those who haven't done anything". But most seem to have appreciated what we could do – most often to talk about the situation, in Sweden and in the country of origin. We have been able to ascertain and explain the legalities, which may not have been understood. We have been able to investigate how a case is going and we have been able to discuss whether there are other options besides hiding in Sweden.

But the very fact that the problems are difficult to solve also means they have another side which we have tried to emphasise: If the child is undocumented and it is difficult to do something about that, at least in the short term, the child must be given an as normal life as possible within the confines of that situation. We have worked directly on this, by talking to children and adolescents about more than problems and leaves to remain but also about friends, education, dreams for the future and activities – a lot of football! Indirectly we have worked on the same thing by trying to ensure that children are given access to schools and day-care and other social contexts.

We have tried to see the child's situation where others have not. Many families live in complicated flight situations and, as we have said, it is common that the child's experiences and need for protection do not even appear in the asylum case. By seeing the situation from that perspective we have been able to talk to parents about the child's needs; we have been able to make lawyers

and case officers aware of the child's situation. It has also been a question of seeing how the child is doing here and now, and ensuring that the child is heard and that someone listens.

We have never ceased telling parents, directly or indirectly: "Don't forget that you are a parent. You cannot wait with being a parent until your situation has been resolved. The child is growing up here and now and the best you can do for your child is to be there for him or her and to try to ensure that the child's life is as normal as possible."

We have been able to explain the situation to school staff and health care personnel who are unsure of what they may do with a undocumented child, and also encourage them to see to the needs of the child as with any other child. We have also conferred continuously with lawyers about the child's situation and what can be done.

In some cases when a child or a young adult has needed a professional contact for conversation the team psychotherapist Mario Morrone has initiated one. He or other psychotherapists at the Save the Children Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crisis have received 20 children and adults. When children and adults far from Stockholm have needed that kind of support we have tried to ensure that they are assisted by child- and youth psychiatry services where they are. For some children and parents we have ensured that a larger medical investigation is carried out. In a couple of cases the project has funded a torture investigation.

Often it is precisely conversational support that is needed. But we have mainly strived to ensure the presence of support persons in the child's vicinity who sees him or her. The best thing is if we or someone else can support the parents so that they – who are there continuously – can offer good support. That is why we have had much contact with rectors, school nurses, designated representatives, asylum group activists.

The statistics show that counselling and direct conversations with children or parents are the most common action – having occurred in relation to most contacts. Thereafter come the conversations with support persons outside of the family. For more detailed information on the number of children and adolescents given support, see the statistics annex, page 100. We do not know how many have found the information they needed directly on the web site. On the website there was information on rights aimed directly at the children, as well as a fact database with up-to-date information aimed mainly at adults.

One group of children who are not included in the project's statistics is constituted by those who were given a welcome break in their existence as undocumented when they got to go to a summer camp at one of the "ordinary" child camp sites outside Stockholm. The camp was organised for them by the organisation *Ingen Människa är Illegal* [= No One is Illegal]. The organisers turned to Save the Children for get help with planning, crisis readiness and help with funding. *Utanpapper* contributed with tips and advice and even help with the rent. We received fulsome reports in words and images about the intensive week and even recordings with songs and radio

transmissions created by the children. The poem *All I want is to land* which introduces and has given this report its name, was authored and performed at this occasion. The same organisation organised a summer camp also in 2008.

Undocumented children – children first and foremost

A recurring observation in the yearly report *Utanpapper* published in the spring of 2007 was that undocumented children are treated first as undocumented, and second as children. We noted that the children were victims of discrimination on several levels. *First* by not always being given access to care and social support to which they are entitled under Swedish law, sometimes because of staff not having knowledge or thinking it inappropriate, sometimes because regular actions do not work in the children's insecure situation and sometimes because of practical difficulties. *Second*, the discrimination resides in laws and regulations in that the rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child are not included. *Third*, there is an economic discrimination in that actions on behalf of undocumented children are not refunded by the state in the same way as for other children. Taken together it did not seem that undocumented children were as important as other children.

This observation remains after yet another year. Undocumented children do not have access to their rights. This means that these children are in reality treated as if they were less valuable than other children. However, throughout the year an intensive discussion has taken place and awareness raising activities have been performed, not least by a network working with the issue of health care for undocumented individuals. This has had an impact and it is likely that our own work has also in that it has become more common for health care personnel and school staff to be aware that undocumented children have rights. The discrimination by laws and regulation remains but is under discussion.

What has happened during 2007-2008 accentuates that which we have been able to see from the outset: much depends on the actions of individuals, and that much could be different and better for these children, if they were always seen as children first and foremost by all who they meet. This is a realisation which inspires continued work.

The concrete efforts by *Utanpapper* focus on rights children are entitled to even in exile – the right to parents, the right to health, the right to education.

At the same time we have seen that the need for adult contact and social support is great. Sometimes the conversational contact has been the most important support for a teenager. Practically, however, a central little team cannot be a conversation partner for many children and adolescents in the country. That is why the natural work method has become to encourage the adolescents' contacts with support persons in their surroundings and to provide support by being there for the support persons to bounce ideas off.

We have tried not to let the unresolved societal issues obscure our vision as to which concrete efforts can be made for the child. That is why we also got to experience the great joy of the day little Ahmed, 5 years old, was reunited with his parents after having been left undocumented in the country of origin when

his father was forced to flee. We got to share the joy the day Ismail, 17 years old, was admitted to school after having been excluded for a whole year. And we got to experience the relief the day Susan, 15, after all the pep talk, dared come to the court and tell the judge what had happened to her – and be believed!

Example: Susan dares not tell

A 15 year old girl e-mails.

“Hello! I’m a girl who’s come from (...) with my mother. Now we have our first rejection on our application to stay in Sweden. I don’t think it’s a fair decision if we are sent back it can mean the end for my mother and I will be sent to hell... I was attacked in (...) several times so severely that I ended up in hospital .others have burned down our house .dad and brother survived. mum is really strange and cannot sleep because she thinks about what has happened all the time. It makes me very sad and scared to see mum like this. We ask you to help us because what the lawyer does to help us is not enough. This letter is written by a friend of mine because I don’t speak Swedish well enough. Regards: Susan”

We generally do not work with asylum seekers but since a child has made contact we respond.

“Hello Susan and thank you for your letter. I understand that you are worried about what will happen. As you say, you and your family have been through many unpleasant events which have naturally taken their toll on all of you. Your mother seems shocked by what has happened and I understand that you think about her a lot. I would like to ask you if it is ok for me and another person working here to ring your mother this Friday at 13.30 for a talk? We usually ask a few questions about how the situation seems at the moment. I want to make it clear that we probably cannot do anything to make you be able to stay since we are not a government body and do not have that authority. But we can start by talking. Please e-mail me back so that I know if the time is suitable or not.

Kind regards, Tyko Granberger”

The girl e-mails back and says that it is OK. We ring the mother who tells a story of violence and abuse with ethnical and political motivation. The girl has several times been the victim of violence, something she mentioned herself in e-mails to us. But the mother also relates that neither the lawyer nor the Migration Board has considered the girl’s experiences. We continue to e-mail the girl who has fears of her own.

“Hello Susan

It is good that you write to us. I will try to answer the question you had and also to give you a thought. You ask whether children can stay here after two years. It is true that the Migration Board can take into account if you have stayed here long. But it is not the case that if you have been here for two years you get to stay automatically. Instead, what matters to the Migration Board is whether you have ties to Sweden. By ties is meant a life here, whether you

speak the language well, have been to school. That is why it can be good to get certificates from school as to how you are doing and how your teachers and others at school think you function. If you want to, maybe you should ask a teacher and maybe the school nurse or counsellor to write something on how things are going for you at school. It is not certain that the Migration Board will care that much about such certificates but it is good for them to know the situation.

Then I have a thought for you. I think that it is important that both the lawyer and the Migration Board hear your story and what you have experienced in your country. Otherwise maybe your mother can tell them if you do not want to. It may be that the lawyer will not ask you directly and maybe you will have to tell the lawyer yourself that you want to tell him, or ask your mother to. You have the right to tell what you have experienced. Good luck at the court and please be in touch if you have any other questions.”

The reply to the suggestion to tell her story arrives quickly:

“hello. We’re about to go to the court. but I’m really scared and I don’t want to speak about things that have happened to mine family. if I go won’t change anything or not.regards.”

Before we respond we again speak to Susan’s mother and find out that she has met the lawyer who has not shown the least interest. She says that the lawyer was on the phone about other matters during the conference. Even she asks whether going to the court will serve any purpose.

It is by no means obvious that we should place the burden of participating with the girl. On the other hand there is a risk that this will become yet another case where the grounds of the child are not brought up. There is no way for us to determine whether the lawyer really is uncommitted but it is true that there is not a word about the girl’s grounds in the decision from the Migration Board. We decide to contact an experienced female lawyer who can meet both Susan and her mother at least one occasion. This lawyer explains how things work at the court to both mother and daughter. She talks to the girl alone about her experiences and explains that she can ask to see the judge alone as well. At the same time we try to encourage Susan.

“Hi Susan

It is completely normal that you do not wish to discuss the things that have happened to you and your family. It is so horrible and it is not strange that you feel scared. At the same time it is very important that the court knows what has happened. You have experienced things that no child should have to experience and it is important that those who decide get to hear about it. Maybe they will then understand that (...) is not a safe country for you to return to. Unfortunately I cannot promise that you will get to stay even if you do tell your story but the chances are greater.

Also, sometimes it can feel good when you have been able to tell your story and your thoughts have come out. I think that your teacher, Erika, can come with you to the court if you want. Mario has spoken to her and has been told

that you will also be able to speak to the counsellor on your return. You are also very welcome to write to me whenever you want.
Best wishes, Tyko”

Susan goes along to the court but without expectations. Immediately afterwards she e-mails and asks what they should do should their application be rejected again. But a few weeks later the court's decision is handed down. We do not know what Susan said at the hearing since parts of the decision are confidential, but she has evidently been listened to and she is mentioned in the decision which determines that she is in need of protection. Susan e-mails again, now with her mother:

“Hello. I wish to thank for your help with ours leave to remain. Without your help it wouldn't have been possible. We are eternally grateful. We now have leave to remain and wanted you to know.
Eternally grateful. Susan and Nancy.”

4. Sweden – dream and nightmare

Tyko Granberger has worked as an adviser within the *Utanpapper* team. He is the one who has answered the helpline most of the time and has even maintained prolonged contact with a number of adolescents and support persons. In this section he highlights the children's own voices and what he feels we can learn from them. Please note that no real e-mails to the helpline are quoted. Some of the quotations have been lifted from interviews with children who now have leave to remain, others have been constructed so as to look like e-mails received by *Utanpapper*.

The first quotation is not at all from *Utanpapper* – but could have been¹²:

“I spoke to a guy who said that he was sick of everyone calling him hidden. I thought that maybe he would rather that people referred to him as undocumented or – despite no longer being so in the legal sense – asylum seeker. That is when he said that he did not wish to be called that either nor did he wish to be referred to as a child. Confused, I asked him what he wished to be called and he replied ‘Safar’.”

The denomination hidden is something adults place on the child, not something the child places on itself. The child will not change his or her whole identity because its asylum application has been rejected. It does not change overnight from an ordinary to a hidden child. What changes is how adults perceive it, the rights it ought to have access to and thereby its entire situation.

Only a child who currently lives or who has lived in hiding knows what it is like. *Utanpapper* has been in contact with children of all ages but in this part it is mainly the voices of teenagers which have been collected. Their stories give an insight into what life in hiding is like. This section is as much an exposition of their strength as a description of their vulnerability. Through their strength they remind us adults that they are entitled to a good life while at the same time showing that they are survivors who suffer through a for many unthinkable existence. And they show us that they – despite not always being allowed to – remain children.

However, the child's own strength is not always enough. An existence without functioning adult contact or societal care will wear the child. Often they are forced to take upon themselves great responsibilities in the family, both psychologically and practically. Psychologically they are often left to their own devices in understanding an asylum process and migration which will be difficult to comprehend as well as perturbing. In some cases they also become stand-in parents for their siblings but also for their parents. Psychological and

¹² Free adaptation of a similar example by ethnologist Gillis Herlitz, lecture in Växjö 4 June 2008.

practical responsibilities go hand in hand like when the child as a consequence of their parents' linguistic shortcomings has to act as the family interpreter.

The image of Sweden

Most children who live in hiding have some time lived openly in Sweden. These is not true for children who were born during the family's time in hiding nor children who were never part of the asylum process – but it is true for most children. Most of the children have also some time had an image of the country Sweden, a dream of something better. We have been told of this image in e-mails from abroad.

“We wish to go to your free country Sweden. Can we live there in peace? We saw the site [utanpapper.nu] and understood that we have rights and that the human being has value in your country.”

Merdan & Jivan 15 years old, from Iraq (translated and modified quote)

To fleeing children who have not yet come here, Sweden can be what they hear about and dream of. E-mails from adolescents outside of Sweden often contain descriptions of Sweden as the country of human rights, peace and freedom. The letters paint a picture of a country where they can attend school, where they will be free of harassment for belonging to a minority or where they will not suffer beatings because they are children. Sometimes we detect, in the background, the dream, for instance, of not having to worry about mum suffering while you are in school or of escaping the fate of being a child soldier in the wars of adults.

The thought of Sweden seems to wake an expectation of a place where all will be resolved and where it will be calm and pleasant. For some this is how it will be. Those children who meet with security and are well-received dare believe that Sweden wants them and that they have been given a new home, irrespective of the length of their stay.

“Love the country Sweden so much. I love Sweden and I read much about Sweden when I studied geography, about the form of government, social life and the language, which I want to learn. When I finish my studies I want to live in Sweden. I hope you will help me with this. I wish all happiness to the country Sweden.”

Arman, 17 years old, from Syria (translated and modified quote)

Once on site the asylum seeking families and children are given access to rights they have perhaps never had before. That is why, despite worries and the wait for a decision, they can maintain the expectations which brought them here. However, for those who go through a protracted asylum process and are faced with the rejection of their application, expectation turns into prudence. The hope of a better life recedes in the insecure existence. To the question of whether she dreamed of the future a girl replies:

“Now, I didn’t dare, neither that nor hoping for freedom. I was too scared it wouldn’t happen, scared of being disappointed again.”¹³

Emina, 20 (interview)

Every once in a while the prudence turns into despair. Despair can be triggered by the hopelessness after yet another rejection or the powerlessness faced with the break-down of the family. An existence both obscure and difficult to comprehend causes many to seek answers to why they live like they do and why no one does anything about it.

“Hello I write because I can’t take it that I don’t know what’s going on .I hate going home, Saturdays and Sundays are the worst we are too tired to cook and no one says hello and all just slam the doors. I just thought I’d ask you why we aren’t told anything?, what will happen when the police have decided ? why don’t they listen when we explain?”

Angela, 15 years old, waiting for a decision on re-assessment
(modified quote)

Dealing with the worry, the powerlessness and the fear is difficult for adults and even more difficult for children. It is stressful having to understand questions which in many cases have no satisfactory answers. “Why did we flee? Why cannot we stay? What happens if the police come? What happens if we are expelled? Why should I have to think about all these things, cannot anyone help me, I am only a child?” The most difficult thing to understand can be that there is no way or solution in sight. A family is completely paralysed and gathers its final strength for a call for help:

“I want you to take my three children so that they can live like other children. We want to get rid of this nightmare. Why don’t you understand me? My husband has collapsed and I think he has become crazy. Our children are dying slowly. They fade away physically and mentally. We have hoped so much but now all we have left is patience, how much should a human being take? Five years is enough, we live and die every day and we have no sense left in our heads. Please help us to care for our children and if you don’t have children of your own please take care of ours so that they can live for real.”

Alina, hidden parent (modified quote)

It is particularly difficult for children to make sense of the situation and that is why many children seek to understand, perhaps in order to keep hoping. The child needs hope for there being a way out of the nightmare, back to the dream of security and freedom.

¹³ The interviews quoted here come from the report “Barn utan papper – barn först och främst” [= Undocumented children – children first and foremost], Rädda Barnen 2007. The interviews were prepared by Tyko Granberger through one-on-one telephone conversations with the adolescents and thereafter through panel discussions which he conducted at the seminar “Papperslös men inte skyddslös” [= Without papers but not without protection] on 23 March 2007. The personal follow-up interviews with each adolescent were conducted by Anna Waldehorn.

... and reality

One's situation, however, is difficult to come to grips with when you are a child and especially when you are on the run in a strange country. Children who flee to Sweden and live in hiding face a world of mixed messages. Perhaps they have learned already before coming here how well Sweden would care for them. "In Sweden all children get to go to school" the mother may have told the girl who was not allowed to in the country of origin. "They will care for you in Sweden so that you don't have to join the war" the uncle said to the boy who did not wish to enlist in the army or join the militia. By seeing how other children in Sweden live the children learn about injustices but also about rights. They learn that rights are also someone's responsibility. One boy sends letters to organisations he thinks can intervene.

"I don't know anymore how many countries we have been and it was many years since I could go to school my siblings haven't even started. Please help us because our rights which it says Sweden should ... i am now 15 years old and it isn't right that I should experience things adults don't have to. Please don't forget about us."

Yusuf, 16 years old, several rejections in different countries (modified quote)

The message about the value of the child is muddled by the personal experience of discrimination and exclusion. At the same time as the child is taught that she or he has rights it is also told that it is illegal. In a child's head there may not be that great a difference between the country of origin and Sweden, if the police are after you in both countries.

"The police came at five o'clock in the morning. We had cooperated all the time and dad told them but despite that we weren't allowed to pack anything, we just had to go out to the car. Everyone saw what they did to us, like we are criminals. I thought mum would die on the plane she was all white ... then they left us there and said that we should go to the police in a house there.. The Swedish police officers said that it is OK we shouldn't be afraid. I had to go with mum and I saw that they beat her but then they let us go. They let dad go several months later when it was the new year but my big brother is still missing ..."

Victor, 15 years old, expelled family who have returned (modified quote)

The child's self-image and image of its own worth are affected by how it is treated. The child in hiding sees that what has been promised has not been fulfilled. The child is not aware of the rules and considerations that stand in the way, but she or he will understand that it is treated differently to other children.

When expectations and reality do not coincide the dream of Sweden risks turning into a nightmare. The child is unwanted in Sweden and is aware of it. In the worst case the child will feel not only like a victim of powers outside her- or himself, but also like the culprit who is to be punished.

"I want to know why I can't go to school. Previously i went to school but now we're no longer asylum seekers I cannot. We have been rejected from Sweden many times but my friends are at school. Mum said school was dangerous and that the police can

catch me there. Why they can take me I am not a criminal!! Can you make so that I can go back to school now?

Loana, 13 years old, in hiding (modified quote)

Defence by self-sacrifice

The child who is seen and is treated as a burden can internalise that image and accept it, and find it difficult to see her or his own worth. In order to deal with the disappointment and the frustration, some children accept both guilt and responsibility. Having recourse to an act of self-sacrifice or at least thinking about it can seem like a possible strategy in impossible circumstances, a way to change your own situation as well as that of your family. The possibility that the family would be understood if the child sacrificed itself may give the child who has felt so worthless a sliver of power.

“I so love to be alive, but it feels like I'm no longer alive i think about the soldiers all the time and the houses they burned... I went to the park and when I saw the birds that don't have to think about anything I thought that if i jumped out the window i would be an angel and fly like the birds. Maybe everybody would understand that mum should not have to go back to the war. But i can't die because my mum wants to go with me all the time and I have to comfort her...”

Fatma, 12 years old, asylum seeker (modified quote)

The thought of sacrificing yourself can feel like a protective set of armour. Armour like that can weigh down and hurt its bearer. But self-sacrifice can also be a strategy for survival, a way to comply. Children are eminently dependent upon their parents and other adults, especially children in hiding. They have, like their parents, to comply in order to receive support and assistance from the authorities. Own needs have to take a step back, and the situation of dependence makes it difficult to react to injustices. An underpaid worker finds it difficult to complain to her or his employer, a bullied student finds it difficult to tell teachers and the principal. What would the protest lead to? The employer turning the worker in to the police? The school calling parents and report to the police? It is difficult to stand up to a person on whose good will you depend for your survival.

“In august i hiddet first time! since i not known anybody lived in school room. days worked illegally in a office where man who 50 gave me job. Paid, times were whole days and nights and worst was he talk sex to me... i met other man who gave me test job in dog shop i pretended i not rejected but as soon as find out i negative, he threaten that i quit if i didn't do sex with him. I have been at other places and always become the same. i become ill that i been alone at home if i go out everyone do what they like with me ,i can only cry when at home. I live in basement now. Need someone to stopthis or i can go school again. please hlp me!”

Marjam, 21 years old (modified quote)

Some children takes the blame themselves, or shut the worry and the anxiety up inside. Others manage to express their feelings and protest. The reaction is a sign of health, which shows that the child is alive and exists, but also that she or he realises that it is the situation which is abnormal and which could

change – not the child itself. That thought can be a source of strength. “If nobody else will do something I will have to do it myself” thinks a girl. “If only they understood what I’m going through they wouldn’t treat me like this”. “I exist and if nobody else sees that I’m going to have to show them. I’ll call the lawyer.” A girl sent her letter to the bishop, the prime minister and Save the Children.

“I have done well at school now and my friends are there and Hasse my teacher. I don’t want it to start all over again that I can’t go to school, I want to start ninth grade and that all be normal. I live here.”

Angela, 15 years old (modified quote)

Locked in – shut out

Children who live in hiding grow up fast. They often have to partake of things they are not mature enough to understand. At the same time at least older children and adolescents need to know what is happen in order to keep at least some control over their situation. Gramoz, Edona and Alöna, who have all lived in hiding but who now have leave to remain, told a conference of their adult role in the family whilst emphasising the importance of being allowed to be a child.

“It is important that adults ask children how they are so that they also feel that you’re alive, otherwise you can feel very excluded. In hiding you grow up very fast. You’re not a child but become a dad in the family. You translate for your parents and follow them everywhere to interpret. Because you came with your parents you sometimes get to know too much. Sometimes you just want to be a child, play a little and not care so much about your circumstances.”

Gramoz, 18 years old (interview)

“I was angry all the time, that we never went into town nor did anything fun. The one time we’d get out was to see the doctor or the lawyer. It was unfair and I was angry with my parents... But I tried to understand. What I missed the most was freedom.”

Edona, 14 years old (interview)

“I was maybe 13 or 14 when I could translate and it felt a bit grown up: Now I know something my mum doesn’t. Often it was good that I came along because the Migration Board had bad interpreters... It was good but at the same time I lost my childhood... at the same time it is important not to withhold information from the child, they you’re not taken seriously. But of course, sometimes I would have wanted to be more like a child.”

Alöna, 17 years old (interview)

Some children identify themselves with their supporting function to the point of convincing themselves that they carry the family on their shoulders. A twelve year old girl answered a question of whether her mother could attend a meeting with the asylum group in a nearby locality like this:

“ Yes... I have spoken to my mother about that meeting, and she said that she feels insecure without me. She can't understand how she'd get to Malmö without me.”

(Elvira, modified quote from telephone conversation)

The extent to which a child can manage a family's situation depends on a number of factors. A small child who is told all too much may find her- or himself locked in an adult world. An older child who is not told anything may, on the other hand, feel shut out, even if parents have only tried to protect it from the hard to understand. “Don't bother about that, it is adult matters!” Children who have already taken on too much responsibility in the family can have much knowledge of the situation and may be in need not just of being relieved of the responsibility but also of understanding and recognition. If they are simply relieved the protection may become an exclusion. The child has been deprived of her or his survival strategy without anything in return and is left in a situation of increasing frustration and loneliness. The balance between protection and respect is about meeting the child where she or he is.

“ When I told adults things they sometimes said: I understand. That made me angry and frustrated. It felt like nobody could understand what my life was like, because you felt so alone. So when they said that they understood it was as if they were lying and then you didn't feel like talking to them about your problems. Adults should take children seriously whilst being at their level.”

Gramoz (interview)

Children in hiding need to play too

It is not so strange that children in hiding have difficulties hoping. They are victims of circumstances and cannot choose another existence. They cannot make their parents healthy or affect authorities' decisions, but some of them are nevertheless put in situations which would be difficult to handle even for an adult.

“ As I was the only one who spoke the language I got to go with my parents to see the doctor or to the Migration Board and the lawyer. I always understood what was going on and when my dad needed to go to the doctor for his pains I had to come along to interpret. I was there at the x-ray and when they were going to blast his kidney stone. That day I didn't want other children to see me. I felt different, when you're a child you're meant to be in school at that time of day. And what if someone thought it was strange that I wasn't in school and stopped me. What if they discovered that we lived in hiding and sent us back.”

Edona (interview)

Through the helpline we have come into contact with children whose dream of freedom and security in Europe has ended with violence and abuse. Several have been beaten by the Greek police. There are children who have been beaten even in Sweden. A few boys have ended up in the street after having been rejected and survived by begging. Other adolescents are used in irregular work and suffer abuse.

These children are most certainly victims. Even those adolescents who have eventually been granted leave to remain may have lost parts of their childhood

to exclusion and vulnerability. Alöna put words to this: “I came here as a 12 year old, became the teenager, but missed everything because we weren’t allowed to stay”.

Many children and adolescents nevertheless find strategies for surviving and keep their life spark. If fear and worry do not numb or paralyse completely, also children in hiding play. Many surveys have shown that children in hiding have greater possibilities of staying healthy and managing a difficult period if they have the opportunity to live as normal life as possible: playing, meeting other children, attending school, etc. Even children with whom we have been in contact through the helpline or have interviewed have in different ways said that “the whole of life does not have to be about being hidden” – as Gramoz expressed it. Even if the situation changes you still have same needs as other children.

“Sometimes you want to be a child too, play a little and not care so much about your own circumstances... You’re not just hidden but a person too.”

Gramoz, 18 years old

The contact with understanding and secure adults is important for the child. Emina tells how good it was sometimes to get away from her family and their situation and to be with a different set of parents with whom she could be a child. Edona speaks of the importance of adults who can listen when the child needs to talk and how good it is not to have to keep everything bottled up inside.

When children meet adults who listen and are there for them and provide support in form of understanding, relief and warmth, the child’s inner strength increases whilst the despair decreases. This constitutes a basis for hope to return. Many children who have lived in hiding relate the importance to them of the support from outsiders. In many cases they also wish to do something for others. They want to help people in situations similar to those they have lived through, by becoming teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, aid workers and becoming part of an adult society that understands and receives.

“And in the future if we get to stay in Sweden I will study to be a lawyer. If I become one, I will help people with the same problems as me.”

Yusuf, 13 years old (modified quote)

Through her or his stories and letters the child in hiding reminds us of the fact that she or he lives in physical but also in moral oblivion. The simple wish expressed by certain children shows that the child has been excluded from the most evident of rights.

“I would have wished for someone else to be responsible for my family. I would have wanted to be an ordinary child with friends, school and activities like all other children. I would have wanted to come home and say: Mum, I’m going out now!”

Edona (interview)

In a society founded on the equal value of all human beings and particular care for vulnerable children there ought not to be any excuses to justify a child's life being curtailed in this way. To set aside the human rights of children implies that the child is not considered equally valuable as other children. This the child can internalise, with lowered self-esteem as a result. Instead of extinguishing the child's inner strength adults in her or his surroundings have the possibility to allow it to grow. The rights the child is given access to and the value she or he feels that she or he is given affects the way the child will feel and develop in life.

"In my dreamsweden all children will be allowed to be children and even though the parents are in hiding the children will be allowed to go to school. It's not the children's fault that wars are waged in their countries of origin and they will be allowed to live like everyone else."

Gramoz (interview)

Example: Ismail took everything on himself

Ismail came to Sweden at age 15 from a former Soviet republic. His parents had been killed in an attack and he himself had been kidnapped. During six months he had been kept locked up and been beaten. He only related fragments of what he had experienced but it was patent that he would not consider returning. I'd rather die than go back, Ismail said the first time we spoke. "I promise that I will kill myself if the police come, no joke!" Ismail and his family had not been allowed to submit an asylum application in Sweden because they had come via another EU-country, namely Poland, on their way here. Sweden had not reviewed their case but had sent a request to Poland which had been accepted. The family assumed that they would be further removed to the country of origin. Ismail and his family went into hiding. You have to help us with the asylum, Ismail told me. During the meeting with Ismail I had to consider his circumstances, his maturity, his knowledge and ignorance, his needs and wishes.

We had many long conversations which were initially about the asylum case but which increasingly came to touch upon Ismail's own thoughts about himself. We did not have a fixed schedule; rather we spoke of that which came up when we lifted the lid. Sometimes it would be football; equally often we spoke of his present situation. Thus letting the conversations flow between different aspects of his life was important for him to be able to share his thoughts about his existence. The questions which came up often related to his role in the family. Ismail, whose Swedish was the best in the family, had been the interpreter for all family affair and was very *au fait* with the family's situation. However, he would sometimes interpret it slightly incorrectly. It was impossible for him to understand everything that happened to his mother and father – or for that matter to his sisters. Nor did he understand all the procedures and rules relating to the family's asylum. With me he was able to reflect upon and talk about what he wanted and did not want to do, which obligations and the level of responsibility he had and what he did not have to spend more energy on. The asylum process cropped up increasingly rarely

during our conversations. Our point of connection in the counselling became our human relationship rather than the issue which had brought us together in the first place. By speaking freely he had somewhere to escape to where he could be a young guy with all that entails. When Ismail later started school he could make contact with other adolescents and our contact became less frequent.

Supporting a young person like Ismail is a balancing act. Finding a balance between keeping him uninformed and thereby risking him feeling worried and excluded, while at the same time protecting him from that which he was not equipped to deal with was challenging. It became important to distinguish between facts and feeling, especially fears and fantasies. Conversations were affected by dualities such as helper – vulnerable, citizen – non-citizen and adult – child. Knowing your role is important. Even so I want to try to meet Ismail as “Ismail” the individual and treat him as an equal, beyond the roles.

Ismail had to accept great responsibilities in the family and part of my job was to show him that he did not have to shoulder the responsibility of the wellbeing of his entire family in order to be good enough. When the parents barely take care of themselves and even less the child, the child often assumes the role as fixer – or she or he her or himself becomes part of the dysfunctional family. The role I assumed, as a big brother or extra parent, of finding ways to relieve Ismail both practically and psychologically, as well as setting boundaries for his responsibilities, was important. That is why it was also important to find support persons on site who could become the family’s network and relieve them.

Tyko Granberger

5. *The tear in the weave*

A psycho-social observation of individuals residing in Sweden without papers.

Mario Morrone Lamanna is a psychotherapist with long experience from Child Guidance Clinic for children and adolescents, institutional work with teenagers and as a psychotherapist for adults. Within *Utanspapper* he has acted as a consultant for the rest of the team, but has also seen seekers for treatment. Here Mario summarises the difficulties associated with a life in hiding and illustrates the work with a few examples. The examples are real but details have been changed to prevent the identification of the individuals concerned.

The group of undocumented is heterogeneous. Some have set themselves up in a way which is testimony to remarkable initiative and ability. Despite being bitter over the treatment they feel they have suffered, they struggle and manage to organise things for themselves and their families in a, under the circumstances, good way. We must not turn them into victims, nor must we forget that sometimes they are.

In most cases their problems are objective, in the sense that the problems derive from present life circumstances. First they have difficulties with Swedish authorities. One must not make the mistake of equating the denomination undocumented with psychiatric difficulties. For some of them the strains involved in a life in hiding become the cause of the mental balance tipping the wrong way and mental illness may ensue.

Emmigration/Immigration/Exile

People have always moved and the reasons have varied. Emigration means to depart, to leave. Immigration means coming to stay. Emigrating as well as immigrating are parts of a process which can be gradual or overlapping. The people who are undocumented have initiated a process – departing – but are unable to finish the next stage, arriving, and therefore find themselves in no-man's-land. Some have left their countries of their own volition, some are forced or driven to it.

In ancient Athens it could be decided that citizens should leave the city for political reasons. Then the name of the person punished was written on a seashell (ostrakon) and the exile into which you were forced was called ostrakismòs. The primary objective was punishment, these people should leave the city because they were unwanted. The punishment consisted in these people being deprived of the community with the rest of the citizenry. The undocumented have ended up in a situation where they are also “countryless”. They cannot return and there is no country that will receive them.

The London-based Argentinean psychotherapist Claudia Yelin has, among other things, written about the travails of immigration and exile. I borrow her

metaphor of life as a weave because I consider it a beautiful illustration of the contexts we humans are subject to and live within.

As individuals we are constantly a part of different groups in relation to which we have different types of relationships, which generate both duties and rights. It is an invisible weave which surrounds and of which we are part. We take our participation in it for granted. Parts of the weave are more tangible than others, like family, friends or work. Other parts of the weave we take for granted and do not notice. They are there like the air we breathe and we dedicate no thought to them until something happens which alerts us to their absence.

The weave is constituted by the interactions of all members and a warp constituted by different elements, languages, customs, geographical belonging, common opinion about history and/or the future, that which in other words is usually called culture, contribute to keeping the weave intact. On the personal, subjective plane, these aspects fulfil an important psychological function. They provide stability and contribute to maintaining our sense of inner continuous context. In other words they are a part of our identity while at the same time contributing to its maintaining.

Moving, emigrating, going into exile, all cause a tear in the weave, but because we are part of the weave, the tear also wounds us. When the obvious and, for that reason, unconscious disappears, feelings of confusion appear. The realisation of the loss, when it occurs, often appears gradually. The pain, on the other hand, is there pretty immediately without your being aware of its roots. When so many aspects of life change in your surroundings, it can be difficult to maintain an inner feeling of continuity and identity.

Integration

At the same time leaving this invisible weave behind and assimilating the new weave with language, customs, social codes, expectations, scents, climate and so on, is a slow, difficult and painful process. But it can also contain curiosity, excitement and relief. At the same time, even under optimal circumstances, the re-adaptation is time consuming. Some researchers assert that the integration process takes several generations, that only the individuals who are born after two generations consider themselves as part of the society their ancestors have moved to. There are big individual variations in terms of how quickly the process gets underway. Factors such as age, educational level, level of ambition and the reason for leaving your country of origin matter.

An important factor in this context, which is outside the immigrant's influence, is the preparedness of the new country to receive new people, how welcome, needed and respected they are. Another aspect considered important in the research is whether the immigrating individuals intend to stay in the receiving country, how they see their future: do they want to stay or do they want to return as quickly as ever is possible? Those individuals who see the receiving country as nothing more than a temporary refuge, irrespective of the length of their stay in the country in question, find integration the most difficult.

In Sweden we are used to things working in accordance with expected patterns. There is a strong trust in authorities and public administration generally. People who come here have in many cases been told beforehand that Sweden is a democratic country, that people who flee persecution are received. At first they are surprised, and then afraid and sometimes irritated when their reality collides with the demands of “fine” civil servants for certificates and documentation. The undocumented often experience that civil servants question and doubt their stories and intentions.

The necessary readjustment of the mental structures immigration presupposes is put on ice as soon as the seeking individual chooses/feels forced to go into hiding in order to avoid an even greater problem: being sent back to the country of origin (usually) or a third country.

How do people in hiding feel?

The individuals we have met during the past two years have not been well. Those we have met via e-mail, telephone conversations or during visits to Save the Children have been fearful and anxious. We have been able to establish that many of those we have had for treatment and strikingly many of the children and adults we have been in contact with show symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia and irritability. A common denominator for many is having shown real anxiety. “Real-anxiety” is the kind of anxiety which is directly related to outer circumstances. That kind of anxiety is connected to situations understood by the individuals as a threat to or as implying the loss of fundamental areas such as, for example, self control, safety, security, freedom, health and integrity. For the hidden, all these areas are in danger.

The adults with whom we have been in contact have expressed a feeling of inability to master their lives. Uncertainty for the future and the experience of powerlessness sometimes cause feelings of suspicion and anger towards the country and/or the people one had expected assistance from. Others react by blaming themselves and by turning the anger inwards, resulting in symptoms of depression.

Real-anxiety usually fills a function: to signal that something is not right and to signal danger. In this way we are both physically and mentally prepared to defend ourselves or to flee, in other words to find a solution to the hemmed in situation. That preparedness manifests itself in a number of bodily reactions such as increased vigilance, increased pulse, increased blood pressure, muscular contractions, quicker breathing. This state of preparedness should carry on until the threatening danger has been avoided. If the outer factors having caused the reaction are rendered permanent, the risk of it leading to injury of both a mental and physical character appears. That which started as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation, risks derailing should the state of preparedness last or become permanent. We have met individuals who have been in this state for more than eight years.

Some of the adults we have met have expressed great disappointment over the situation they find themselves in. They feel that they have no alternatives to

hiding. Life in hiding makes it possible for vigilance, suspicion and fear to gain the upper hand and influence one's entire existence.

The hidden need contacts in order to survive and end up in a state of dependence in relation to other people in order to perform the simplest tasks in society. The dependence affects all spheres of life – finances, accommodation, health care, and so forth. The state of dependence encourages feelings of powerlessness to make themselves known and these, in turn, lead to regression: some people start to think, feel, behave at a level below their real ability. Parents and young adults whom we have met experience shame over having to depend on others; they are tortured by feelings of shame and by feeling a burden to others. In order to survive and because they want to decrease their dependence on others they have accepted to work for salaries which are usually very much below normal and under unsafe circumstances. All do not manage to set themselves up or to make the best out of the situation. Some people have not got sufficient strength to suffer through the situation, not least because they were already marked by bad experiences prior to coming here. They show symptoms such as insomnia, lack of appetite, weight loss, despondency, nightmares, indifference, irritability. The list goes on. These are the most common symptoms, at least among adults.

Many of the individuals who find their way here and decide to go into hiding have long experience of persecution.

We all feel a strong need to understand the context in which we find ourselves; it confers a feeling of control over ourselves and our surroundings. When we are faced with situations that we cannot control, or with unknown issues, we tend nevertheless to try to render the new comprehensible to us. But if we, as is often the case with the undocumented, neither understand nor are in control of the situation we create explanatory models which can be very much contrary to reality. That is when for instance fantasies of being followed, which can be more or less detached from reality, appear. Yet another way of dealing with the situation, which is not very helpful, is to deny the extent of the difficulties associated with the situation of being hidden and in that way distorting the vision of reality.

In adults with children it is not uncommon to discover a strong feeling of guilt towards the children. That guilt comes from a number of sources. Some have expressed guilt over having become involved in political activities which led to the situation in which they find themselves today.

Others do not regret their decisions but suffer because the children cannot lead a normal life, that the children lack important adults, grandparents, who have stayed behind in the country of origin. Nor are the children able to meet peers on equal terms. The parents suffer from their execrable financial situation. They cannot offer their children the same standard as others in terms of food, clothing and toys.

The children

The children depend on adults, usually parents, to be responsible for their wellbeing. If we are to be able to see and try to understand the child's reactions they have to be seen in context. The context most children find themselves in is their family. The children in these families see parents who are worried, irritable, gloomy and show different physical symptoms such as headache, back and stomach pains but mainly a lack of joy and faith in the future, which children so well need. The children are naturally solipsistic, i.e. they assume that everything that happens has got to do with them. Children are more solipsistic the younger they are. If the parents are unwell children automatically relate this to the own behaviour: "it must be something I have done wrong".

Many of the children we have been in contact with have been separated from individuals who have been important to them. Sometimes they have been separated from the parents in different stages before coming here, or during their time in hiding. Sometimes they have been left in the country of origin with people who have served as stand-in parents, usually grandparents. Separations of siblings also occur. We know that separations often give rise to feelings of guilt; the children will not infrequently think that they have done something wrong and that that is why they cannot live with their loved ones. As if that was not enough, separations cause the feeling of continuity and context to be disturbed. We have met children whose emotional and intellectual abilities have been affected by repeated moves and separations, resulting in developmental delays. These children have become very sensitive to separations and are generally insecure.

For some of the children, one way of dealing with that situation has been to regress. That means going back in the emotional/cognitive development to a level already left behind. An example most people will recognise: when a child gets a sibling the child can react by again wanting to wear a nappy despite managing without, or the child can become clingy and demanding and wanting the parents' attention in a way he/she has not previously needed.

The insecurity has a real source. The families feel under threat, and are threat from the police arrest. Several children with whom we have been in contact express their fear that the police can come and pick up them and their families. Some children have experienced violent interventions from the forces or order, and some have literally run away from the police when the police have come to their place of residence. Since then, fear has become part of their everyday life and has coloured their life. One teenager related that he had armed himself with a knife the first weeks in Sweden as he was afraid the police could send him back. We have met children who have been afraid to be in school because they have thought that school staff might be cooperating with the police. It is common among the children in hiding that all contact with people and/or institutions considered to be representatives of "official" Sweden, such as school and health care institutions, is characterised by suspicion and fear. Children who have had access to schooling often express a feeling of being different and not belonging to the groups of which they are a part, such as the school class.

Not infrequently the children exhibit behaviour problems. They are hyperactive, cannot concentrate, jumpy. We have been able to observe that the parents of these children often have reduced holding capacities, i.e. the parents' ability to deal with the children's reactions to, among other things, frustration, sorrow and disappointment is reduced, often due to the prolonged process of wearing down that waiting in ignorance entails.

Some children remake the situation, i.e. they do not display their own needs of continuity, security, caring but instead become "self-sufficient" with an omnipotent attitude to their surroundings. Through this behaviour the pain involved in stating that the parents are insufficient is deflected. Or, as in the case of unaccompanied minors, they are also forced to fend for themselves. The children behave as though they both can and want to deal with all the problems that come up not just for themselves but also for their own families. A teenager who temporarily lived in hiding with a family, systematically declined all she was offered beyond the food. She did not wish to be burden to the family which accommodated her and spent most of the time alone in her room.

P is a social 16 year old guy who is serious about what he involves himself in. He has found temporary work; his way has earned him the respect and admiration of both colleagues and management. There are only two people who know of his status as hidden.

The fact that he is liked, combined with being hidden, becomes a problem for him. The colleagues have invited him to partake in different activities after work. P has declined every time, and come up with different motives. He is afraid of being outside and for that reason to come into contact with the police. Now he is starting to worry, the excuses for his not coming along are running out and he is afraid that the colleagues may think that he considers himself superior and therefore does not want to spend time with them.

The children lack the fundamental security stemming from the fact the most basic needs have been satisfied.

The psychotherapy

The therapy with both families and individuals is untraditional in many respects.

In psychotherapeutic work ordinarily the importance of a fixed framework of, among other things, times, place and regularity is emphasised. These so-called parameters serve to create the security which enables and provides continuity for the process which psychotherapy entails. Working with hidden individuals it can be difficult to maintain this framework. The therapist, depending on the context in which you work, may feel the need to do things others are responsible for or which the patient deals with in ordinary therapy. The therapist has to be prepared to make contact or cooperate with authorities with which the client is in contact. You contact teachers, lawyers, the Migration Board, doctors, etc. You might relax parameters such as fixed times, place and so on, if necessary. There are several reasons for this. Most

individuals in hiding do not speak Swedish, or their knowledge is limited and in addition they have a reduced view of the organisation of society. For that reason they will not know where to turn to. How long can the family or the individual reside in the locality where they happen to be at the moment? How far must they travel to the surgery? Can they afford it? Can they come regularly?

There are practical difficulties in conducting psychotherapy with people in hiding. As a therapist you have barely established that the need and the motivation for psychotherapy pertains when you can identify a different type of difficulty: people in hiding lack the fundamental security which is ordinarily considered essential in order to begin and conduct psychotherapy.

I have often asked myself what I have to offer this family, this teenager, or child, when all has felt hopeless and it is difficult to see any light on the horizon. But not infrequently the families have been grateful for someone listening to what they have to say. We should not underestimate our role as the one who “lends an ear” to a fellow human being.

Example: Fatima, Celina and Ricardo

Some thoughts on original trauma and the status as hidden, as well as inner and outer world.

18 year old Fatima came to Sweden some eight years ago. She came with her family: mum, dad and a brother. The family applied for asylum, their application was rejected by the Migration Board, they appealed and were again given a negative decision. Since the family were of the opinion that they could

not return to the country of origin without suffering reprisals the decided to go into hiding. The family has been broken up since then, partly for practical reasons – the family is composed of several members and they did not wish to impose too much on the people with whom they stayed, partly for security reasons – the police find it more difficult to round up all the family members if they live at different addresses. Fatima was referred to us by a volunteer organisation. The psychiatric surgery where she had a year-old contact was of the opinion that they could no longer treat her since she lived in hiding. When she came to Save the Children for help she was depressed, afraid, showed symptoms of phobia, and had spent several years isolated.

The first assessment was that Fatima’s current problems were the result of converging causes: there were traumatic experiences, generational disputes, the aftermath of the oppression the family had experienced in the country of origin, and the life in ignorance in Sweden for more than eight years (of which approximately five in hiding).

With that background, the support of the family had been crucial for Fatima’s survival. Without that context she would no doubt have acted upon her declared suicidal intentions

The conversations

The work has consisted of individual conversations once a week, mixed up with family conversations and consultation with a psychiatrist and medication. It has been necessary to offer family conversations since the family has been in crisis. Fatima's way of relating to the outside world appeared to consist of a mix of nonchalance and reclusiveness. She was of the opinion that "the game's up" for her and consequently she thought that there was nothing left for her to do. Time after time she said that the sole reason that she was alive was that she wanted to spare her parents the grief of her death. She systematically rejected every attempt at injecting some hope in her. During one period the family was again asylum seekers and she could have moved about outside, but even then she rejected suggestions of making use of the freedom she could have enjoyed. The trauma had left traces of fear and hatred which she turned against herself.

On one or two occasions I have been able to observe an unfortunate confluence of the original trauma and the status of hidden taking place in the affected individual (in the cases where they have been the victims of traumatic situations before going into hiding).

Fatima's trauma appeared when she was affected by feelings of powerlessness and fear when both her mother and little sister were the victims of abuse by the security services in her presence. She was only a child but also a big sister and therefore she thought that she ought to defend the mother and sister. Now in Sweden, in her conception, there was no difference between the officials of the security services and the authorities which denied the family refuge here.

For Celina, another young person, the trauma was, on the other hand, connected to an early abandonment. This trauma had left traces in the form of suspicion towards the intentions of her surroundings, a gnawing feeling that no one can be trusted and consequently a strong need of being forced to manage on her own.

The status of hidden activated, by fear and insecurity, the original trauma. In everyday life, the most banal events could take on frightening proportions.

One example: Celina has been admitted to a school where few adults were aware of her status as hidden. One day when she is walking in the corridor, a teacher she only has a fleeting acquaintance with says hello. Celina is immediately seized by the thought that the teacher has probably found out that Celina is in hiding and that that is the reason for the friendliness. She does not mind the friendliness, but on the other hand she is afraid that if word spreads that she is in hiding, also the police will sooner or later find out, she will be arrested and returned.

Another young person, Ricardo, relates a similar event: an adult with whom Ricardo has a close relationship, passes by him without saying hello, probably preoccupied by his own thoughts. Ricardo's fantasy is that this adult thinks

him a burden due to his situation as hidden and does not want anything to do with him and therefore ignores him.

Because this adult means a lot to Ricardo – he literally depends on him – his interpretation of the even becomes painful and difficult to bear. If the people he depends upon grow tired of him, he may be abandoned. In this way the original situation, the one which triggered the trauma, re-occur. His experience is that he risks being orphaned again.

In both cases an everyday, apparently banal occurrence – being greeted or not – awakens feelings of being different. “I’m someone who hides, is here ‘illegally’” and “I’m someone liable to being abandoned because I’m a burden on others”.

In the first instance, Celina’s self-image is of an oddity (someone who is treated different because in hiding). In the second instance it is Ricardo’s experience that he may be a burden. Both instances are potentially dangerous since they may result in being left behind, and this constitutes the connection with the trauma experienced by both adolescents (both have early experience of being abandoned by their parents).

However, this is not solely about Celina’s or Ricardo’s tendency to interpret their surroundings with reference to earlier experiences but also about a real situation of abandonment: Celina was legally a minor when she applied for asylum; she arrived in Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee aged 15. She has really been betrayed – by the authority to which she had turned for help.

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, psychotherapeutic work with people in hiding is different from “ordinary” psychotherapy in a couple of ways:

a) Unpredictability of the continuation of the process

As I have written previously most people seek help because they feel that they have difficulties with Swedish authorities, they feel that they have not been listened to, experience real-anxiety in relation to their situation. In some cases it has gone so far that psychiatric difficulties have appeared. Not infrequently the status as hidden has been the triggering factor. The reality of people in hiding does not change by virtue of seeking help – at best the way of dealing with it will change. The individuals are in hiding and there is always the risk that the contact will be broken off, for various reasons: the need to leave the locality of residence, the police have found the family, inability to afford the train/bus/underground fare to come to therapy, and so on. Reality tangibly forces its way into the therapy room.

b) Difficulties in maintaining a traditional psychotherapeutic framework

The psychotherapist has to take on a more active role in relation to the patient’s surroundings. Ordinarily psychotherapy patients are more or less part of the “weave”. Individuals in hiding are not and are therefore lost and find it

difficult to navigate in society. The legal possibility for individuals in hiding to use various social benefits or rights is severely limited. One has to be aware of the alternatives available to them – voluntary organisations, churches and so on. Patients in hiding have limited linguistic abilities and often do not have a very large social network which could help them make the necessary contacts. As a consequence of his or her knowledge of the “weave”, it is not unusual for the therapist to make referrals, ask lawyers, make contact with schools, etc. That in turn prepares the ground for the therapist to be idealised, more than usual, as he or she gradually abandons his or her position of neutrality. An increasing process of idealisation may entail both risks and benefits. This will depend on the patient’s personality structure as well as the therapist’s ability to use it to serve the process.

Finally, I find it important initially to define with the patient the purpose of the conversations on which we embark, and above all to be able to talk about the risks involved and which could cause the treatment to be broken off. There may be cause to return to this later during the process.

Mario Morrone Lamanna

6. Being a support person

The report *Barn utan papper – Barn först och främst* [= Undocumented children – children first and foremost] published by *Utanpapper* in June 2007 contained several sections on the role of support persons. They dealt with how you might react when meeting individuals in vulnerable circumstances and how you can deal with your reactions. In this chapter we will reconnect with some of these ideas in order later, in a new interview, to let two of the colleagues at *Utanpapper* reflect upon the difficulties you may experience as a support person.

When we here use the expression “support person” it is intended to be vague. From the child’s perspective there are different adults from whom they may receive support. They may be adult volunteers in an asylum group or Save the Children association, adults they meet in the course of the exercise of their profession such as teachers or maybe at church. They may also be persons whose job it is precisely to support the person who feels bad, such as for instance a psychotherapist. The discussion in this chapter mainly deals with how persons who do *not* have such a professional role deal with being a support person, even if the reasoning naturally may apply also to an experienced therapist.

Tyko Granberger was hired as a consultant to the *Utanpapper* project, one of his most important tasks being to answer the helpline. He had experience working with adolescents in other settings but is not a trained psychologist or psychotherapist. At the last interview he described how the meetings with adolescents and families in difficult circumstances had given rise to feelings such as frustration, sorrow or rage:

“It is not wrong to give flow to your feelings. However, that I as a support person constantly identify myself with the grief of the individual seeking help is not constructive for either of us. (...) The most difficult aspect of my work is the feeling of not being able to affect the situation of the individual seeking help. There are rarely any simple solutions, sometimes there are none at all. It can also be difficult to handle the anonymity of the e-mail. In most of our contacts with refugees we have a face or at least a voice of the individual seeking help. There is none of that in the e-mail. The person who has written the e-mail has often had time to describe her or his situation. For this reason e-mails can be very difficult to handle. Anonymous and abstract, yet exposing.”

Tyko related how he had tried to think in order neither to be too depressed nor to seclude himself.

“When I feel insufficient as a support person I try to think that the situation of the individual seeking help is not worse simply for me knowing about it. If in addition I have done all that is in my power, at the moment there may be nothing more that I can do. I have to try to accept that there is nothing more to be done.”

He thinks it is about being able to change tracks and speak to the children about completely different things.

“You are never simply an asylum seeker or in hiding; you are so much more. You are a child, a girl or a boy, a football fan, a student and above all a human being.”

The motivations of support persons

Mario Morrone is, as has been described earlier, a psychotherapist and has worked with refugee children since the 1980s. In the named report he described the importance, as a support person, to be aware of your own motivations, otherwise there is a risk of doing more harm than good. He enumerated **political, religious and humanitarian motivations**, as examples of having ideas of rights, all human beings' equal value etc. that you want to concretise. However, for most people there are also **personal motivations** which, for instance, may come from personal experiences of suffering. Now you want to repair or to try to “make good” that which earlier has gone wrong, or you simply do not want for others to have to experience what you yourself find difficult, humiliating or painful. Feelings of guilt for being better off may also be a factor.

Mario also brought up that support persons may have motives they are more or less aware of. It may be a wish to be needed, but also a wish to feel power – something which may be less pleasant to admit to oneself. Such motives may lead to counter reactions from the individuals seeking help in the form of unreasonable demands of the need to signal the position they themselves once enjoyed.

Mario Morrone also related how both children and adults may regress, i.e. going back to an earlier stage in development which feels more secure, when they are subjected to important changes or other situations which are difficult to handle.

“Regressed children are often quiet, lose their language, wet themselves, stop playing, lose their appetite, suffer from insomnia or become quarrelsome. Regressed adults are often experienced as irrationally demanding, angry, naïve, messy, irresponsible, sycophantic, irreverent, accusing, clingy and sad. They may be experienced as ungrateful, experience feelings of unreality, paranoid delusions, divide their surroundings in good and bad people.”

“Regression among adults in hiding is often a consequence of them feeling completely powerless. They have lost control over their lives; their fate is in the hands of others. They may also have experienced several losses of which they are mostly unaware or in denial. As long as the denial persists it is difficult for them to reorient their lives.”

The reactions of support persons

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist, a psychotherapist at the Save the Children Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crises and also the project manager for

Utanpapper, followed this line of reasoning and described that individuals who have regressed may give rise to strong feelings in the people they meet:

“In the support person it may create a wish to care for the individual seeking help. That may in turn lead to the individual seeking help remaining regressed or even that the regression deepens. Regressed individuals may also become demanding, accusing and angry towards the support person or others in their surroundings. Such emotional outbursts are difficult to handle and can cause frustration and irritation in the support person, feelings which for many support persons are taboo in relation to the refugee families. The support person may blame her- or himself: I cannot be irritated with this mother, she has it so hard.”

The expression *parallel process* is used within psychotherapy to explain how processes and feelings can be transported between a client or patient and a psychotherapist, and even be mirrored between the psychotherapist and her or his supervisor. Monica explained how this could be applied to the relationship between support persons and help seeking refugee children or families.

“The support person can experience or become a carrier of the same feelings that pertain in the families they work with. For instance an individual seeking help who is entering a depression can transfer this process onto the support person. With their every meeting the support person, in the same way as the individual seeking help, sees fewer and fewer alternatives and soon becomes overwhelmed by the situation.”

“The transfer of feelings and processes is partly due to the possibility of identifying yourself with the individual seeking help, i.e. to put oneself in their shoes and feel what they are or have been subjected to. However, some support persons also experience similar situations as the individuals or families seeking help. In the same way that the refugee family has been received they may be rejected by authorities when they try to further the family's case or they may be treated irreverently when they attempt to support a family member in seeking care. By being subjected to the anger, prejudice and guilt of others, also the support person may experience a feeling of powerlessness. A family which lives in hiding can also adopt a fragmented conception of the world with sharp distinctions between good and bad people. For them reality becomes unfathomable and filled with anxiety, sometimes paranoid and almost psychotic. If the support person is drawn into these force fields, he or she may him- or herself feel threatened, confused, followed and powerless.”

A particular situation which may be important to understand is that which appears when a support person feels that he or she has been kept in the dark by the individual seeking help. It can feel subject to taboo to talk about lies among individuals seeking help since families in hiding are constantly questioned by Swedish authorities. Nevertheless, the feeling that someone you have tried to help has lied to you may be very provocative and painful and is for that reason important to identify. The feeling of being betrayed is reminiscent of experiences from other relationships and may give rise to strong feelings such as anger and disappointment. In order to be able to move

on we need to find a path by which we can find satisfaction. To lessen the powerlessness we need knowledge which assists us in not being afraid of again meeting others, says Monica.

Together, Mario Morrone and Monica Brendler-Lindqvist identified four important parts of the safety net a support person needs:

- To have collaborators and to be a part of a network – i.e. not exceeding your area of competence or wearing yourself out, but to cooperate with others around the tasks.
- To admit to yourself that you may experience different kinds of emotions, positive as well as negative – it means having to be connected to oneself and being able to identify one's own problems and needs.
- To be given the opportunity to vent your thoughts and emotions with others – for instance by being part of a team which has the possibility of regularly discussing dilemmas which appear.
- When needed, to be assisted with putting words to inner conflicts, for instance when you start experiencing emotions which take hold of your private life. At that point it may be necessary to seek outside assistance from a professional psychotherapist.

Lessons from the experiences with Utanpapper

The first year with the helpline was difficult. There were many difficult conversations and the roles of the collaborators as support persons were unclear. Thereafter the activity was better structured, among other things with limited telephone hours and a clear division of labour. An hour and a half per week were set aside for Tyko Granberger and Sanna Vestin, who took most of the telephone calls and e-mails, to be given the time to discuss problems, follow-up and perspectives with Mario Morrone as a consultant.

Now they meet again, in order to discuss how the direct support has worked. Sanna asks the questions and listens, while Tyko and Mario respond.

Tyko: It has been intense, I have become very close with the help seekers, and dealing with meeting one's own little self in those you meet along the way has constituted a big project. At first I probably took myself as the starting point and related to things I myself had experienced or heard about. When I, for instance, spoke to a certain boy I felt that I really had to help him, and that was due to my being able to identify with him. I did not always see the subjective in this, my own need to help someone who resembled me. But when I had worked longer I think that I moved on to seeing those I meet more objectively.

Mario: Working with individuals in need of help can awaken feelings rooted in your own vulnerability. What you are saying is that you could identify so much with the person you were meant to help that it was difficult to

distinguish his needs from your own. You have moved on from that to distinguishing the needs. I believe this to be very important. Otherwise there is a risk that you do not see the other's needs but force solutions onto her or him which do not work. Asking "with what do you need help?" is helpful. Then there is the next question: what is it in your power to do.

Tyko: In the beginning I had difficulties identifying with an individual. "I understand you, I feel not only empathy but also sympathy, I think I can feel what you feel..." I became completely obsessed, and we talked a lot about this in the team. Then when I was to take a step back and try to establish a framework for how much I would do, I worried that I would distance myself too much. There was a period when I thought a lot about how to maintain a balance. How to refrain from sympathy without distancing myself from those that I meet.

- **Are these difficulties different because you are working with undocumented individuals?**

Mario: A reaction always happens when you get too involved. Then you want distance not to drown. However, I feel that the problems in setting boundaries are also related to us having created this enterprise as we went along. We have a task and we are paid. In such circumstances you want to work as professionally as possible. Included in that is knowing what you are doing and why. However, when we began there was no structure for working with undocumented individuals. There was asylum counselling, and psychiatry and other sectors but no general helpline to which we could turn and ask "how do you do it?". How to balance distance and closeness, that was part of the structure that we had to create. There were no express expectations from Save the Children about what we were meant to do with those who came to us for help. The project depended on being able to find external sponsors.

Tyko: Another difference is that there does not seem to be any structure for resolving the fundamental problem in the way there is for other children and adolescents. If you work with a family who are citizens you know for instance that they have a Social Services Act on their side. If the situation becomes too difficult for the children there is a final resort in the possibility of them being taken into care. However, for undocumented children the structure seems less obvious, although it ought not to be. That forces you to be inventive in a completely different way! At the same time it can all become diffuse. I may feel that I am working on the surface – deeper down there is something I cannot master and that is the entire asylum process.

Mario: Yes, the needs of these children are so great and some of them are beyond your powers to satisfy – you cannot provide them with papers! By virtue of this, many other problems arise and you have to prioritise; which problems do you deal with? You can never say that now there is the necessary support. You can do nothing against the asylum process, but there are other needs you can try to assuage, such as access to school, day care, health care. Even so needs always remain since society is not there as it is for all others.

- **What kinds of feelings does this give rise to?**

Tyko: It is exciting because you get to work creatively with an area which is unchartered. At the same time it is incredibly frustrating, that there is no prepared path to take. There is a lot of work around the perspectives, the way others see the children, whether they see them as children or solely as undocumented, and the way they see themselves. It creates frustration, you feel how small you are. But becoming angry can also give you a spark, fuel to keep on fighting. You can feel that there really is a concrete problem and that what you do matters.

- **How does your frustration manifest itself?**

Tyko: I throw books to the wall! No, I do not. I carry the frustration in various situations. I become angry. But it is difficult to find someone to direct the anger at. Am I angry with an individual or with a culture? If I am irritated with the family I am trying to support or with the case officer at the Migration Board, it is on the individual level. If I have read a letter to the editor and become irritated with the debate it is on the cultural level and if I am irritated with a new legislative proposal which further limits the rights of undocumented individuals it is something on a structural level. If I can distinguish the level of my irritation it may be easier to use the anger constructively.

Mario: Part of what we experience as injustices depends on gaps in the law and on governmental decisions; that is on a political level. It is also important to see that what we do in the project helps assuage some of the failures also on that level. We have for instance had an influence when it comes to schooling for children in hiding. But then there is a different kind of anger which relates to the anxiety which you partake of when you meet the families. It is difficult to withdraw from such anxiety which is real and which has to do with the insecure future. You are contaminated with the family's powerlessness. Then there is yet another frustration which can appear because we ourselves belong to a culture and have values which may collide with those of the family, preventing you from understanding their behaviour.

Tyko: Yes, you meet a family in a difficult situation but often also a family with a different cultural background to your own. Cultural competence is good in order to understand the roles in the family, how they relate to each other, why it is always a certain individual in the family who rings... I need to know whether there is something to that culture which I need to consider when I wish to talk to the children or see how they relate to each other in the family. Maybe it is difficult if they are patterns you are not at all used to yourself.

Mario: I both agree and disagree... Certainly you meet families with different cultures. But it must not be the case that you have to attend classes to be culturally competent and that all others disclaim responsibility. If you meet families of a different culture you can always ask "why do you act in this way?". You can be curious and involved, tell them that you do not understand

and how you yourself usually do things. Otherwise there is a risk that you create strangers, distance. The way the debate has been going these last years, talk of cultural has almost come to replace race thinking. “They are of a different culture and therefore we cannot receive them...” However, it is obvious that if you meet a family where the parents hit the children or the men hit women or there is no knowledge of the needs of children – then you react by resisting, it is a reflex. However, most parents want what is good for their children. If they are given the opportunity to find different models they will imbibe knowledge. It was like this in Sweden as well. One has to remind oneself that it was not long ago that corporal punishment of children was banned here.

- **As a support person, how do you handle all the frustration?**

Tyko: As a support person you need to work with your own personal development, it is unavoidable.

Mario: Working with your own needs can be more or less comprehensive, from attending analysis five times per week to supervision or consultation from time to time. If you work professionally there have to be structures for this. It is important for us in the project to have time set aside to talk to each other, to vent about what happens and to talk about the feelings it awakes. It is like that in all work where you meet individuals in emergency. Those working for the fire brigade or the police also need supervision and knowledge that there is someone who is responsible for the work they perform. I think there is a difference working as a voluntary support person in a small town. It is good that there are people who do, but there is a risk that you burn out if you do not receive sufficient support yourself. It is taxing time after time to be confronted with powerlessness, anxiety, frustration... Naturally there are also moments of joy but most of those who seek out support persons do so because they have problems. Being aware of how you react to that and finding a way to deal with the difficulties that appear is what is important.

- **Within this project you have served as counsellors for many other support persons. Can you say something about their needs?**

Tyko: Many support persons come with a reaction. “It has gone too far, I have encountered something I can hardly believe is true.” When you feel that you have seen something incredible, that is when you have to talk to someone. But to whom? I have often been that person, when I have answered the telephone.

Mario: Support persons have come to us for different reasons. Some have rung here when they are overwhelmed by the problem, when they no longer know what to do. They want to talk, they want help with a lawyer and other things. Others have rung more in order to inform Save the Children of things; they have wanted to make us aware of the incredible things happening, that a child has been denied care or whatever. But we have also come across support persons who have wanted to throw out a family they have hosted, they have

felt completely overrun by the difficulties and have not had the strength or the resources to deal with the family's problems. Sometimes it has been enough to listen and talk about the problem, in the same way as it may sometimes help refugee families to get to talk about the problem.

Tyko: Another positive example may be having developed a child perspective after conversations with us. Maybe the child in a family has been the one in contact with authorities and others, for the parents later to realise that the child can be in the centre without having to shoulder the responsibility. At the next conversation with us they may use an interpreter instead.

- **Is maintaining the child perspective difficult when you at the same time have to protect the child from having to shoulder too much responsibility, and you try to speak to the parents instead?**

Mario: Certainly, it can be difficult to keep the child perspective alive when you are mostly speaking to the adults and listening to their needs. That is something I have had to learn with time. But even adults in families with children in hiding may need strengthening. If you can support the adults you indirectly help the children. If the adults are not functional, that will affect the children. The majority of the adults are out of work. Providing for yourself and your family contributes to integrity and self-respect. We cannot provide work – but if you unload some other concerns from the parents they may have more strength for being a parent.

Tyko: The challenge is knowing what the child's needs are. If a parent comes and says that we have to do this or that and you have to help us... The parents has the responsibility and the right to decide that I should move, that I should get married, that I should get a divorce, the child should quit school. If the support person misses the contact with the child you will not know what the child's needs are.

Mario: This is the same as with other families. These children are more vulnerable rather because the parents have been weakened. The children need safety and continuity like all children. These are the two things undocumented families lack. Continuity, safety – even emotional safety.

- **Does my motivation matter to the person I am trying to help?**

Mario: It matters if it starts to interfere with work, if you stop listening to the person in need of help.

Tyko: You can have many motivations. If at the start they are wanting to help yourself or conduct a political campaign against an injustice, and if you feel good by helping they that is OK – as long as you realise that you have motivations of your own. At every meeting, every decision, I have to see whose needs I fulfil.

Mario: The problem is that often we are unaware of the motivations. People who are motivated by their political needs sometimes destroy rather than help, since they have a preconceived schedule in their minds. That could be, for instance, not wanting to speak to anyone at the Migration Board because they are enemies. That attitude makes dialogue more difficult. In the end it may become more difficult for the individual refugee to get what he or she needs. There may also be those who want to save others, which also is a different need from wanting to help the individual person. There is a risk that you lose sight of the family's needs.

Tyko: That is why it is so important to remember what you are working *for*, rather than overemphasising that which you are working against. I work for a better life for these people, more than I work against that which I think is unjust. You have to create something in order to achieve something constructive.

- **Could wanting to be the one who helps also be a motivation, to feel good and needed?**

Mario: That is not a bad motivation, who wants to be bad? If you try to work professionally within an institution you have to be aware of the applicable frameworks and expectations within that particular institution. If you are a professional there are also clear expectations of what you do in your professional capacity. In small localities, however, where there may not be many institutions, you have to work with what there is and make the best of the situation. Benevolence, common sense and reasonable self-awareness will get you far.

Tyko: Drawing the line is difficult, even as a professional. But it may be more difficult if you are working as a volunteer without an initial, clear framework. Then you meet the undocumented as fellow human beings first and foremost. It must be difficult to know what you are to do and why, where to draw the line.

Mario: Regardless of your propulsion, you have made a free choice. Also that may take you far. Things also tend to sort themselves out naturally. If you, for instance, start off by offering to accommodate a family you may discover that this does not work, when the situation has not been resolved within a few weeks as you thought. These relationships are not so very different from other relationships, you should not mystify them. You must always be aware of your own limitations. That which is different with undocumented individuals is that their needs are so much greater. No money, nowhere to stay, no food, needing to see the doctor, to go to school... That is why setting boundaries becomes more important, not least for yourself. For instance, you need to know when it is time to put this person in contact with a doctor or a lawyer.

Tyko: When you find someone to support it is easy to frame the picture: I am a good hero whilst the help seeker is a victim whom I can help. However, the help seeker may want to be her or his own strong person and to her or his own things. I am thinking that children in particular constitute perfect victim

objects. They are so vulnerable. But if a helper limits her or his view of the child to victimhood you miss the child's potential, but you also risk leaving the child behind if a conflict arises leading to the severing of contacts. An example would be a family being given all material support and the helpers then thinking they ought to be grateful in their hiding place. The family are climbing the walls and demand something else than being locked in. Then the helper thinks they are being really annoying, she has not the strength to do anything further. Another example is the helper adopting a role of child raiser wanting to tell the family how to act and how to raise their children. There is no perspective of equality, at best it will be charity.

Mario: ... and much of what is done for refugees in hiding *is* unpaid, on a volunteer basis, it *is* charity! They you want gratitude, that is human. It is when you fail to consider the needs of the family that conflicts arise. But if they had not been given food and shelter they may not even have had that... What level of demands can you make of volunteers? No volunteer can fulfil all the potential needs of a family in hiding out of her or his own pocket.

Tyko: But if in the end a child does not dare to confide in and tell the support person what he or she would need because he or she is under the impression that you should not ask more of the support person – then the support person may fail to notice the possibility of a great social exchange. It is not obvious that it needs to be a greater commitment for seeing your own role and that the relationship could be more equal.

Mario: Naturally there needs to be respect in all relationships. These pitfalls are to do with the fact that the relationship will always be unequal when one of the parties has a house and a car and food on the table, and the other wants for everything. That is not incompatible with treating everyone with respect. That respect also includes respecting yourself and your limitations, that you have an idea of what you can manage and what you are prepared to give.

The parade of support persons

Children and adolescents can come across many different support persons during their time in hiding. Here Tyko Granberger introduces some of them...

Kind Karina

Her biggest problem is that she cannot say no – it blocks. However, her heavy focus on being helpful affects her work and she cannot keep her promises, which leads to others being disappointed in her but also to her being disappointed in herself for being unable to maintain the relationships she feels are so important.

Insecure Inga

Unable to provide a firm answer. Avoids making a decision as long as possible. The insecurity is contagious. She wants to help but mainly to be everybody's friend. She does not want to step on anyone's toes and does

nothing hasty. She also wants to explore all the possibilities. Leaving all doors open is a way not to miss anything.

Floored Frank

He has been active for a long time and has been a support through thick and thin. He is there for everyone but himself. Instead of setting boundaries he shatters them. In limitless sympathy he takes everything on himself. He works and works and keeps his promises. Since he is unable to set limits he works himself to the ground.

Sure Susan

She is so sure of herself that she cannot take in any information. She is used to being right or at least thinking she is and runs her own race. Listening is not her strong point and she therefore starts from herself and, consequently, her own needs rather than the needs of others. Her exaggerated belief in herself can also lead to her doing things beyond her abilities.

Angry Aron

He is driven and will stop at nothing when he wants to get his way, whether it is about him or his cause. His watchword is that the end justifies the means. His inner motivation is anger and it can easily be turned on whoever stands in his way.

Inflexible Ingemar

He is clear with the boundaries but mainly for their own sake. A yes means opening up and therefore no is the answer to almost any question he gets. Uncommonly stubborn he says no maybe to avoid getting too close or because the solution he is presented with is not perfect enough.

Complaining Conrad

Going to him with your problems will make them feel worse. He weaves in his own troubles as well as the miseries of the world and the conversation ends with a deep sigh. You will not be nearer a solution after the meeting, rather you will have dug yourselves both deeper in all the problems of the inhospitable and cold world.

Good Grace

Does she exist? She who not only gets things done but also does everything right? She who perfectly balances her own needs and others? Maybe not. Most of us will have to settle with trying to feel our limitations – and what we are good at. Some are good at the legal of the financial, others on social support. Each and everyone can reflect upon what I in particular can give and what my limitations are at this moment.

7. Children in migration

Reflections on the child as victim or as holder of rights

Sanna Vestin is a freelance journalist within asylum law and refugee politics. Her professional background is in other areas but since the '80s she has been a volunteer in intercultural activities and in organisations working for solidarity with refugees. She has been the coordinator of the *Utanpapper* project and has been the main responsible for dealing with e-mail questions. In this chapter she places the experiences from the project in an international and historical perspective. The examples in the section are based on real events but have been jumbled so that the adolescents are not be recognised.

Vera was eight years old when she came to visit Save the Children alongside her considerably older brother. He had arrived in Sweden ten years previously. Vera was born here. They had been sent back to their parents' country of origin after several years but there they had been unable to register.

Vera was undocumented in the parents' country of origin. She was not allowed to start school. In the end they had come back. This time they had not applied for asylum. Both big brother and mum were working, irregularly. They rented an apartment and got by on their own.

I asked big brother why they had come back when he knew that they had no chance of being granted leave to remain but he shrugged his shoulders. We haven't the right to live anywhere, Vera haven't any documents anywhere, he said. Here at least I have been to school and speak the language. Why should any other country be better?

Vera was mad. She commented angrily, repeating just as repetitively as us "Vera, Vera", "documents, documents". She was given a sheet of paper to draw on and she immediately drew something which was probably precisely a document – and which she demonstratively tore up over the rubbish bin. She was visibly sick and tired of hearing about these documents and problems and her own role.

Meeting them was nevertheless refreshing, because they certainly did not behave like victims. Vera was angry and big brother was firm. He asked for help with something and that was that. What he wanted was for Vera to be let into school.

Otherwise it is common for children to be held up as innocent victims. When the journalist writes about the refugee family he wants a sick little child in the picture, rather than the angry father who goes on about his rights. Humanitarian organisations prefer to focus on the most helpless of the victims of a disaster.

The view of the child as a victim dominates the picture of children in migration. *Either* we speak of children in trafficking. Those children are victims of someone who has forced or tricked them into following them and who have placed them in an awful situation. Saving them means saving them from the trafficker, letting them come back home again.

Or we talk of asylum seeking children. They are victims of a persecutor in the country of origin who has driven the parents or them to flee. Then their application is rejected and they become victims of Swedish authorities who want to drive them back. Saving them means helping them stay. *Or* – this is yet another image – they are asylum seekers but not refugees, and then the children are rather the victims of the parents' decision to settle in Sweden which leads to them having to live in hiding and suffer. In those circumstances these children need to be saved from misguided help efforts.

The victim, like the villain, is an archetype we recognise and know how to relate to. If asylum seekers are villains they are to be kept away, if they are victims they are to be received. If the undocumented girl is seen as an irregular worker who pushes down wage levels we (the citizens) should throw her out, if she is seen as a victim of human traffickers we should save her. Either way we are on the right side.

The clichés risk obscuring reality. When asked whether *Utanpapper* has been in contact with trafficked children, I sometimes say no. I assume that the person who asks thinks, for instance, of a sixteen year old who has been tricked away from Moldova and is kept locked up in a flat where she is forced to prostitute herself. No such girl has sought us out. On the other hand on the very first day we received an e-mail from Marjam, a girl whose asylum application had been rejected. She lives in a basement and has to have sex with her boss lest he turn her in to the police.

Possibly it is Jennifer I think of when asked about trafficking. Jennifer is a young girl from Burma who fled to Sweden from trafficking in Thailand. She was thus not taken here by traffickers in human beings but had fled here to get away from them. Now she was due to be sent back. A priest in a northern city rang *Utanpapper* to ask if such things could not be stopped.

Have you met any disappeared children? is another question I have been asked many times. These days I usually say yes because I think of Eddie, a seventeen year old from Afghanistan.

Eddie was out on the town when last he rang and he had slept in the open that night. The day before he had left the youth shelter. He was due to be expelled from Sweden and was incomprehensive. – But I have started school! I've never been to school before, I want to go! - What am I to do now, I have a match Saturday and I haven't got any basketball shoes! - I can't go back to Greece now, the police there beat me and said I wasn't allowed to come back!

Eddie had already been around many different countries, constantly dumped by adults who had not taken any responsibility for him. He had been

undocumented since he was thirteen. He had appeared in Sweden and given us the chance to turn him into a guy who goes to school and plays matches. But that will not happen. He will be undocumented in Sweden if he goes into hiding or in Greece if he is sent there – or somewhere else. There are no rules to stop it.

Eddie will end up in the statistics as a disappeared child. But those who ask about disappeared children will most often not think of him but of children some ill willed adult has provided with a mobile telephone and then picked up from a refugee centre.

In earlier chapters we have dealt with how it is a mistake to categorise children into migrants, asylum seekers, disappeared, hidden, undocumented... Eddie belongs to all the categories. In addition he is *both* an unaccompanied minor who has been sent away to study and have a better life *and* an unaccompanied minor who has escaped death and misery.

Eddie's big brother was kidnapped and killed and Eddie's mother thought that he would be next. She wanted to save him. He is a refugee. Even so he says: Mum sent me here, I came to study.

To Eddie, that is not a contradiction. He came to Sweden to have a normal life, to be the one in the family to study and work. Precisely what he could not in the country of origin. There all he could do to survive was to hide, or possibly join a militia, not having a normal life. Already there he was a refugee.

It is also true that he came because his mother sent him away. Otherwise he would have stayed and tried to protect his mother and little siblings. He is still ashamed of not doing that.

Eddie thinks of how to make it up to those he has left behind. His biggest problem is that one of his little brothers should have been with him but got stuck in a transit country and lives there as a undocumented street child. It was in order to help little brother that Eddie first contacted *Utanpapper*.

Migration as a life strategy

In 2007 Save the Children published a report written by the British researchers Julia O'Connell and Caitlin Farrow entitled "Child Migration and the Construction of Vulnerability". They had gone through all the research they had been able to find in the area and had been struck precisely by the categorisation, and the view of migrating children as eternal victims – naïve, passive, incompetent.

Julia O'Connell notes that the research deals predominantly with trafficking or unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, and it assumes that children's migration is not beneficial to the individual child. Researchers focus on the negative aspects of migration without bringing up any potential benefits to the individual. But most migrants actually see positive results from moving abroad.

According to Julia O'Connell, the increasing literature on trafficking of children is an example of eschewing. Of course, trafficking has to be combated, but the risk is that overemphasis leads to measures on children in migration being geared entirely towards preventing children from migrating, while nothing is done to make migration safer.

Similarly, according to Julia O'Connell, there is a risk that if you focus too much on stopping trafficking in children it may lead to children who migrate in other ways becoming more vulnerable. If, for instance, the efforts lead to an increased share of the work available to adolescents being attributed illegally, the risks increase, mainly for the children who end up in closed environments such as domestic work.

The title "The Construction of Vulnerability" gets at the role of victim given to children when migrants are described. But it also gets at the fact that it is often through state measures against migration that the rights of children are violated, rather than migration in itself being dangerous.

Julia O'Connell and Caitlin Farrow call for measures aimed at ensuring that the rights of children in migration are not violated. Examples of this is the need for more legal ways of migrating so that parents do not see themselves as forced to leave the children in the country of origin, or choose illegal ways to travel. Protection is also needed for children who end up in extremely exposed or exploiting environments, whether they have immigrated legally or illegally.

All children and adolescents who travel abroad are not victims. I only need to go to my own family to see different patterns. I have family in both Sweden and the US. Some of my cousins went over there to stay with family and to study a year or two. That happened in both directions. One of my American cousins stayed with my mother for a year. The exchange has continued in the next generation; now the cousins' children are the ones to travel.

Young Swedes work in Norway. Some go to London instead; the Swedish colony in London is like a mid-sized Swedish city. There are also young Swedes who have travelled to Brazil, Thailand or Japan to work for a while. The parents let them go despite the world being dangerous. And unfair! Poor young people from Africa or China also make these trips, with the difference that they have much greater reason to leave. And at the same time it is more dangerous for them, because they have no legal ways to travel – as a result of visa requirements and other obstacles.

For those who manage the trip there is work. That is why they keep coming.

For many of those who come to Sweden the reputation for protection and human rights is more important than the reputation for work. That is evident from all the hopeful e-mails we have received from abroad at *Utanpapper*, mainly in Arabic.

The question whether migration is positive for the refugee families depends on whether they succeed or not. When the harassed family has reached its limits

and decides to leave they are making a choice between harassments and a calm, normal life in a different country. If they succeed, migration can be the children's great luck in life.

However, most applications for asylum are rejected. The rejection need not be because it would be best for the child to return to the parents' country of origin or that the family has not been through danger. A common reason for rejecting asylum applications is the assessment that they ought to have been able to find protection somewhere else, in the home country or in another country. The authorities can thus accept that the members of the family were harassed and maybe even persecuted, but the decision can still be that this is not Sweden's responsibility. The family is expelled with reference to their having to seek protection closer by.

At this point, with a rejection, the family faces a completely different choice. It is no longer possible to choose between harassment in the country of origin and the normal life in Sweden that you dreamed of. If there is a choice it is between the old life at home and life as undocumented in Sweden. For children who have lived in Sweden a long time and, to a greater extent than the parents, may have left the old country behind the expulsion decision becomes even more dramatic.

The decision may have been made in a democratic order and will probably be executed without anyone threatening the life of the family. To a child who has lived in Sweden for a long time, the experience is nevertheless that she or he is forced to leave her or his home – as a refugee. Even if the family goes into hiding the child is often forced to leave school, family and friends. The feeling of having been violated is strong. Children in hiding are the internally displaced in Sweden.

Children who live in hiding may nevertheless sometimes express the view that even life in hiding is better than the country of origin. No one pelts you with rocks at school, you do not have to run home worrying what may have happened to mum since you left that morning. At the same time, support persons who meet families in hiding know that the insecurity of being in hiding and the lack of the resources necessary for a normal life can be devastating in the long term. All of a sudden the children will nevertheless stay home from school to help mum who is feeling so unwell.

When a family is expelled I sometimes think that it would have been better for them had they never left. Everything is worse. But it is when migration has been unsuccessful that I think in those terms.

Achieving your objectives does not necessarily mean being granted asylum in Sweden. Let us take as an example a poor village in China where entire families have decided to emigrate. They leave a few at a time and settle in the same area in Italy. There they work hard and are still poor and miserable, but they work and they themselves think that they have made a good choice. In a different Chinese village a different strategy has been adopted. From there young people leave one by one, they work abroad and send back money.

Sometimes the young people will start studying, some get married and some end up staying abroad. Others come back after a few years and then it is their turn to build the family's new house¹⁴.

Overall a migration, whether it is permanent or circular, may be as good a life strategy as any. If the migration is part of such a strategy the individual who is stopped and sent back is worse off than the individual who succeeds. The savings are gone with nothing to show for them, if anything you are even poorer. The life situation for many poor young people in China is not better than for the migrant workers in Italy. But if we do not compare with those who succeed but instead with the girl who is tricked by the trafficker and never reaches her destination but instead is sold to a brothel, it would have been better for her to be stopped.

An early description of teenagers sent off on life threatening travels can be found in the book *Sotarpojken* [= the Black Brothers], a children's book by Lisa Tetzner. It was written in the 1930s and is still in print.

The protagonist Giorgio is a thirteen year old boy in a Swiss mountain village who is sold by his impoverished and unfortunate parents. The child traffickers' boat capsizes. Only a few of the boys survive and reach Milan where they are to work as human brooms in the chimneys. The master chimneysweeps keep them thin so that they can do their job. The story is set in the middle of the 19th century.

The book is powerful for both children and adults. The misery in which the boys live and Giorgio's struggle to survive is as exciting as it is fascinatingly incredible how his nice and loving parents could send him away.

However, towards the end the book takes a strange turn. The boy chimneysweeps form an association and are supported by a doctor and other adults to set certain limits to how they are treated. They work under contracts and have very adult discussions about what to do when the contracts expire. When I was a child I thought this part of the book was dull. The happy ending ought to have been the freeing of the boys. But that was not the way it was. The happy ending is when Giorgio is an adult and back in his village as the new teacher. Nine years have passed.

When Giorgio's old grandmother recognises him she reminds him that he did not want to leave and that she then had told him: - If you are a real boy and no poor little coward you'll go. Wasn't I right?

- Yes, you were right, grandma, replied Giorgio. I have always thought about what you said.

¹⁴ The examples have been inspired by several sources: *The passages on migrant workers in Ola Wong's "When a thousand fires lick the sky", Ordfront 2007, an item on Chinese migrants in Italy in Dagens Nyheter and the radio programme Kaliber entitled "En kinesisk flicka [= A Chinese girl]", Sveriges Radio 07.12.02.*

I am not sure that grandma was right. Giorgio was only thirteen. His best friend died in the slums of Milan, with a respiratory disease, hungry and exhausted. He would have needed saving – but to what? They were starving already back home. But Giorgio survived. In the same manner as the war children sent to Sweden from Finland in the '40s, and the children of Iraqi resistance fighters sent to the Soviet Union in the '80s, just to survive. But the children were also harmed by being separated from their parents.

Lisa Tetzner founded her novel on documentary material. What she described happened more than 150 years ago, but the solutions she sees resemble those proposed by Save the Children in the report on children in migration: Make sure there are legal ways, do not force poor people to seek help from villains. And above all: protect the human rights of the children wherever they may be, without first asking which category they belong to.

Parents who hide with their children in Sweden face similar dilemmas as Giorgio's parents. Should I subject the children to this life in Sweden? Or should I subject them to the return to the country of origin?

Victims of migration policies

Vera, the girl who tore up her “documents”, did not seem a victim. That this felt liberating to those of us who met her is related to our efforts in the support work always to avoid falling into the trap of *treating* help seekers as victims in order not to contribute to passivisation and exclusion. At the same time even this little girl was like any other undocumented child a victim of circumstances. Poverty, war and persecution are not the children's fault. They are victims of the people who drove them to flee, or of the circumstances who made the parents choose to leave.

At worst the children may also be sacrificed as a signal to the migration policy. In her book “They are Children Too”¹⁵, the British author Liz Fekete describes how governments in various EU countries establish quantitative expulsion objectives to show that they can handle migration. The target steering causes families with children, older and traumatised people to be even more victimised instead of receiving additional protection. They are quite simply the easiest to expel. At the same time civil servants are forced to execute policies which require that they do not see the children as children.

Children in Europe are imprisoned and subjected to violence. Children are arrested in dawn raids. Children get to see their parents be beaten and humiliated. Children become not only victims, they become *necessary* victims in the struggle over who gets to be in our continent.

The treatment of migrating children is of course inseparable from the EU countries' general policies on immigration. This policy is characterised by

¹⁵ Liz Fekete is head of the Institute of Race Relations in Great Britain. The book was presented at the Save the Children seminar “Undocumented children are also children” 24.10.08. It can be ordered from <http://www.irr.org.uk>

refugee immigration and unregulated labour immigration being seen as threats which need to be withstood, rather than seeking ways of welcoming the spontaneous job seekers and provide protection for as many as possible of those who are on the run. But the fact that children can be treated in a manner normally not deemed fit for children, not even if they have committed crimes, constitutes a special dimension.

Violence against children who are to be expelled is not common in Sweden, even if Liz Fekete's book contains a couple of ugly example even from here. On the other hand, Sweden is at the bottom of the league amongst EU countries when it comes to providing expelled and other undocumented access to human rights. This affects also undocumented children. The current Minister of Migration, Tobias Billström, has on a number of occasions expressed the view that it would send out the wrong signal if individuals who have violated the immigration rules were to be given access to rights such as health care.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to each and every child. It does not distinguish according to the child's status. Every child is entitled to education, every child is entitled to health care. Children are entitled to their parents, children have a right to be heard. Even so Sweden has for example not yet enshrined in law the right of all children to attend school despite the fact that Sweden was one of the foremost proponents of the Convention. This is not something for which only the incumbent government is to be blamed.

It may seem strange that children are not always given access to their rights in Sweden which has such a good reputation as a welfare state. But the good reception has a reverse. The welfare state is founded on the idea that the country's resources belong to the citizens who control them, build them up together and together fund them according to your abilities. It is not a bad idea, it is founded on equality and democracy. The result can be a good society for who is part of it, who is in the system. However, she or he who is on the outside does not count.

Regulated immigration has been a natural part of the system. That which has given rise to criticism and has led to a big debate the last couple of years is not that immigration is regulated in general but that it is regulated through limiting the right to schooling and health care, i.e. by putting pressure on children and the sick.

The wall between inside and outside the welfare state is not situated at the country's borders. It runs through the country, an invisible wall which the undocumented bounce off every time they could use some kind of help from society.

One of the problems facing undocumented children in Sweden is that many consider it perfectly normal that undocumented have no rights. When the undocumented requests some service, the spontaneous reaction from the civil servant can be "no, that isn't possible" without even finding out what the rules

actually say. Many who are active within social services are convinced that it is forbidden to help a undocumented child; it really is not. On the contrary, social services are always under an obligation to interfere if a child suffers.

Even if the teacher, the nurse or the coach wants to help she can feel unsure. Here is a undocumented child who has been beaten, who needs glasses, who wants to participate in football practice – or whatever. She asks what she should do with the child, and is unsure whether it is allowed to treat this child like other children.

This is not the way society deals with other lawbreakers. The person who builds a house without permission is fined and may have to tear the house down but we do not freeze him out of society. We may even be prepared to enter his illegal house for coffee. We would never dream of excluding his children from school or punish them in some other way.

But undocumented children and adults are excluded from rights such as health care, school and care. In addition they are excluded from society's protection against threats, violence, discrimination and other criminal acts. Usually they are also excluded from unions, tenants' associations and other interest groups founded to safeguard the rights of the members. Through their lack of protection they risk being the victims of abuse and exploitation to a greater extent than others.

The experience from *Utanpapper* confirms the conclusion in the Save the Children report, that criminalisation is counter-productive. It will not be easier for adolescents and parents to find alternatives, to find a solution, because they are treated as illegal human beings, as untouchables.

That is why it is important that volunteer organisations step in and protect the children. But it is important that this work be inspired by a rights perspective – not just the victim perspective. Children have rights regardless of whether they are deathly sick or, on the contrary, swear and curse and tear up their documents over the rubbish bin.

If support organisations create a ranking and attempt to save mainly the sick and pitiable it can have the opposite effect. If illness and ill health amongst undocumented children are reduced to arguments in the battle for leave to remain it may contribute to actual illnesses not being received in the same way as illnesses in all other children. The sick child may be met with distrust.

Among the families who have made contact with *Utanpapper* we have come across a number of examples of children who have not received adequate care. There may be several reasons. But that the consideration is at all had – should this child be treated? – we have taken as an example of undocumented children first and foremost being treated as undocumented, and second as children.

There may be genuine difficulties in balancing concerns, for instance around the consequences if an intervention by social services comes to knowledge of the police, but in most cases there is nothing in the law preventing treating children simply as children.

Even if the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not fully implemented in Swedish law, nor is there something in the law prohibiting a civil servant from seeing to the needs of a child, whether in relation to health care, schooling or social services. It is certainly not punishable. Nor is it forbidden to admit undocumented persons into an association. It is not forbidden to play with undocumented children. Being undocumented is not contagious!

Nor is it forbidden to admit children into school. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child it is right. But even if it is right, maybe it is not good? Could it be the case that if undocumented children are allowed to attend school, that would make the situation worse? Maybe it contributes to attracting families with children here to live in misery in hiding?

It is a legitimate question. Nevertheless my answer is this: Yes, it is good to allow children to attend school. If in reality it was the case that children moved to Sweden in order to go to school something is seriously wrong with that child's circumstances in the country of origin. That will not improve by the child being excluded even here. That which ought to be strived for is rather that all countries allow all children to attend school so that that particular issue is not the motivating factor to moving to any particular country.

This is far from achieved. However, most EU countries accord all children the right to attend school in their legislation. Sweden is behind in this regard, despite the availability of resources.

When it comes to poor countries we tend not to ask whether it is appropriate that the children attend school. Save the Children works to make it possible for refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan to attend school, irrespective of their status. It is obvious that Save the Children makes the same demands on Sweden.

A few months later, we again met Vera, the girl who was undocumented here as well as in her parents' country of origin, when she had been admitted to school. Already she was a different girl, happy and talkative.

I am happy it worked. We see how those children who are shut inside with a parent and shut out from society feel. We see how much it means to children to be with others. There is no one who loses on a child joining in and developing. If Vera later ends up in a different country it is better for her as well as that country that she was allowed to go to school while here. If Vera ends up staying in Sweden it is again better both for her and for Sweden that she was allowed to attend school.

It is not the case that children go up in smoke because they cannot attend school or are not admitted into day care. They remain regardless. If they are not admitted to school they will be in the street or, at worst, in the basement where the family live. We do not need more basement children. We need school children, included and happy school children.

For next year I hope that Vera stays in school under the law's protection. I also hope that there will still be organisations that safeguard human rights and someone whom Vera can turn to if she finds herself in difficulties.

Sanna Vestin

8. *Children's rights*

In this section information is assembled on some of the rights undocumented children have access to in Sweden, and which rights are being denied them through lacunae in the legislation or other structural problems.

The right to health care

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, "the Child Convention", all children have the right to health regardless of their legal status. All children should have access to health care according to need. Even adults should have access to health care, something the UN's former rapporteur on health and human rights, Paul Hunt, has brought Sweden's attention to on several occasions.

Since a few years Sweden has given children who have been asylum seekers access to all health care on the same terms as children who are legally resident in Sweden. This was affected through agreements between central government and regional health boards. Since the spring of 2008 this right is set down in law. It is thus not allowed to deny a child the health care she or he requires, assuming the child has been an asylum seekers. Surgeries and hospitals have to have routines in place to deal with this. That the health care is to be on the same terms means that the fee should be the same as for other children, which for some regional health boards means free of charge, for others heavily subsidised.

Medication and aids are not included in the law which means that children in hiding may be forced to pay the full, unsubsidised fee. For asylum seekers there are special rules on patient fees and subsidies of medication.

For children who reside in Sweden without having been asylum seekers the right to all health care is not enshrined in law. Emergency care is always to be provided but the child may become liable to pay in the same way as tourists. There is not ban against providing care on a need basis. It is up to individual regional health boards and the care providers whether they wish to offer care to undocumented children and the practice is varied. The existing routines for reserve numbers and such for children who have been in hiding may be used also for other undocumented children.

Health care confidentiality applies, which means that health care personnel do not have the right to inform the police or the Migration Board on their own accord, nor in any way give out information on individuals to other authorities if that can be detrimental to the individual concerned. The only exception is that if the police "in a particular case" asks whether someone is in the care

institution, the staff are obliged to respond¹⁶. There is also an exception by way of the Aliens Act, which establishes that journals and such which are requested by the Migration Board or by a migration court should be surrendered if the foreigner has adduced certificates on her or his health in a case of leave to remain.

Save the children on health care

Save the Children has worked for the right to health care of undocumented children since a long time and is of the opinion that it is an issue which ought to be dealt with expeditiously as many children risk suffering as a result of their current imperfect access to health care.

Save the Children is one of the organisations which through the “Right to health care-initiative” [= *Rätt till vård-initiativet*]¹⁷ have demanded that all who live in Sweden should have equal access to health care. One of the reasons for this position is Save the Children’s experience that children who live without papers are affected by themselves or their parents not being given the health care they require.

“For children to be divided into groups with varying access to a fundamental right like health care is in apparent violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child’s requirements of non-discrimination”, Save the Children remarked on 17 March 2008 in conjunction with the adoption of the law on health care for asylum seekers.

The right to social intervention

Social services have in principle the same definition of residence as the health care authorities. That means that the basic rule is that the responsibility of the social services extends to people who reside within their catchment area. The Social Services Act makes no exception for undocumented children. Social services should accept responsibility for a maltreated child or a child in risk of maltreatment, regardless of the child’s status. For instance, there is nothing in the law to prevent a undocumented child from being placed in family accommodation or that the family receives income support or other social allocations.

The Social Services officers do not have quite the same obligations of confidentiality in relation to other authorities as the health care authorities do. The fundamental rules on confidentiality which entail that no piece of information is to be given out if it may be detrimental to the individual concerned are the same. But the Aliens Ordinance contains a rule that the local social welfare committee is bound to inform the police the first time a measure is adopted in a case, if it relates to a foreigner who has not applied for

¹⁶ This rule is contained in the Law on professional activities in health care [= *Lagen om yrkesverksamhet på hälso- och sjukvårdens område*].

¹⁷ The “Right to health care-initiative” was founded in the spring of 2008 by 27 organisations, among which Save the Children, in order to work for Sweden to provide access to health care according to need to everyone in accordance with international conventions. See <http://www.vardforpapperslosa.se>

leave to remain even though she or he was under a duty to do so. (This does thus not apply to foreigners who at some point have applied for leave to remain.) The Social Services officers are also bound by the Aliens Act to give out information on a foreigner if the police or the Migration Board request it in order to decide a matter on leave to remain.

A child who has been given an expulsion decision but who has been taken into care under the Care of Young Persons Act may be accorded a temporary leave to remain. The practice in such cases is for the expulsion of other family members also to be postponed, even if there is no express ban in the Aliens Act against breaking up the family. There is nothing automatic in not expelling a child taken into care rather it is for the Migration Board to decide whether the expulsion should nevertheless be executed. Usually this will occur when the Migration Board has made the assessment that the child could be cared for in the country of origin. The child can then be restituted to the parents in order to be expelled with them.

Save the Children on social intervention

In its response on children's right to schooling¹⁸, Save the Children demanded that the Social Services committees' obligation to provide information under the Aliens Ordinance be immediately reviewed. According to Save the Children, as long as the Social Services committees have these obligations situations may arise when staff may experience doubts in relation to their duty to report under the Social Services Act.

Right to schooling

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child all children are entitled to an education. The UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child has been very clear that this means that all children should be admitted to school, regardless of their status. Sweden, as one of the few Western countries not to fulfil this requirement, has been repeatedly criticised by the UN.

An investigation on the right to education was launched by the social democrat government and a green paper was published in the spring of 2007¹⁹. The inquiry proposed a legal right to schooling and pre-school for children in hiding but – in accordance with governmental regulations – the proposal only applied to children with expulsion decisions which could be executed. As with health care undocumented children who have never been asylum seekers were excluded. But even children whose expulsion decisions were statute barred would be excluded from the right to education, as would children whose temporary leaves to remain had expired. This because they were not subject to expulsion decisions "which could be executed". After another year's consideration the centre-right government submitted the proposal for consultation. As this is written the treatment of the proposal is still ongoing.

¹⁸ Response to consultation "Education for children to be expelled or deported" [= Skolgång för barn som skall avisas eller utvisas] (SOU 2007:34), Rättsutskottet 19.05.08.

¹⁹ "Education for children to be expelled or deported" [= Skolgång för barn som skall avisas eller utvisas] (SOU 2007:34).

In practice, many children in hiding go to school since there is not ban against admitting them and many heads of school choose to despite the lack of state subsidies in respect of the individual child. The same possibility exists for pre-schools and day care centres, but it is more common for children to be excluded for these forms of schooling and care institutions, with serious consequences for the individual child.

The confidentiality applicable within school health care is the same as within health care generally. Within the rest of school activity confidentiality is less clear. School staff and day care centre staff may not give out information on the children to other authorities and may absolutely not give out information which can be detrimental to the individual concerned. It is the same rule as applies within health care, and the detriment is gauged from the individual's, not the state's, perspective. But it is part of the school's general activity to handle for example class lists and contact addresses for parents, something which may divulge the child's identity and place of residence. Nor is there any express prohibition against the police entering a school or a day care centre in order to collect a child – even if it until now has been practice for the police to refrain from this.

National tests and grade certificates are handled by way of national insurance numbers. There is no established system with reserve numbers as within health care, rather schools handle this in different ways. It happens that children who go to school are not given grades or are not allowed to apply to upper secondary school due to a lack of practical routines.

Save the Children on schooling

Save the Children works for the right of all children to education, in Sweden as well as in other countries. Save the Children demands that the Education Act is amended so that it is clear that the right to schooling applies to all children equally regardless of legal status.

Schooling can, according to Save the Children, be determinant for undocumented children's mental health. In order to avoid serious symptoms such as anxiety, regression, insomnia, lack of appetite and suicide thoughts becoming chronic the child must be given an opportunity to recover and to live like other children. School becomes the oasis the child needs. School also means hope of education and a better future. When the children are excluded from school this on the one hand means that their rights are violated, on the other that their mental health and development are jeopardised.²⁰

It is the view of Save the Children that the regulations should be formed in such a way that the police are unable to collect children at school with a view to executing expulsion decisions. In order for children to be able to benefit from the schooling to which they are entitled that right has to be made real.

²⁰ Section lifted from the publication "Security, equality, influence – Nine demands on the school of the future" [= Trygghet, likvärdighet, inflytande – Nio krav på den framtida skolan], Rädda Barnen 2008.

According to Save the Children²¹, that is only possible if families actually dare send their children to school and the children feel secure and safe whilst they are there.

People active in Save the Children associations have contacted *Utanpapper* in order to make us aware that children have not been admitted to schools and have requested arguments and supervision. Because of this Save the Children has produced a fact sheet and a guide for members providing information on these issues. The material can be ordered, for instance, from Save the Children regional offices.

The right to family reunification

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child children have a right to their parents. In Sweden the right to family reunification is regulated in the Aliens Act. According to this law children have an almost absolute right to join a parent legally resident in Sweden. Other strong rights in present legislation are those of married individuals to rejoin a partner in Sweden when the latter has leave to remain.

If an unaccompanied minor is in Sweden a parent may move here only in certain circumstances, for instance if the child has been granted leave to remain because of a need for protection and therefore cannot be returned to the country of origin. It is however more common for children to be granted leave to remain for other reasons than need for protection. If the parent is alive and is encountered it is assumed that reunification should happen in the country where the parent is.

The possibility of being reunited with siblings or other relatives is weak and dependent on the fulfilment of other conditions.

As has transpired from earlier sections, families break up in many ways through the situation of flight and the asylum process. Since the right to family reunification is only applicable in certain situations and is not at all applicable to asylum seekers or undocumented, family break-up can be long-lasting and very detrimental to the child.

During 2008 the government is preparing a bill which will weaken the right to family reunification even for spouses and children of individuals with leave to remain through the introduction of requirements on financial provision and a certain standard of housing.

Save the Children on family reunification

Save the Children immediately protested against the government proposal on new requirements for family reunification. Save the Children pointed out that since also nuclear families are affected by the proposals children risk being kept separate from their parents during several years.

²¹ Quote from a Save the Children declaration 28.01.08. See also a fuller argumentation and proposal in the Save the Children response to the consultation on education, 19.05.08.

A new requirement on financial provision will, in the estimation of Save the Children, lead to a setting aside of the needs of children for a safe childhood and access to fundamental rights. There is also a severe risk of discrimination. Foreign children will not have the same right to family life as children who are Swedish citizens, equally children of parents who for various reasons have difficulties entering the labour market risk finding themselves in a worse situation.

In its declaration, Save the Children wrote that already many children are kept separate from the parents: "Government should, rather than erecting new obstacles, put more effort into ensuring that families who have been forced to flee their countries of origin can be kept intact also during the flight. All of the obstacles countries like Sweden have introduced to stem the tide of refugees cause family members to end up in several different countries in their strife to find effective protection against persecution and war. This is something the Swedish government should address forcefully rather than introducing regulation which results in families being kept apart after one family member has been granted leave to remain in Sweden".²²

The Save the Children Sweden national congress of June 2008 adopted a special declaration where it said: "Sweden has bound itself to following the Convention on the Rights of the Child and it says that children should not be separated from their parents and that applications from families who wish to reunite across state boundaries should be dealt with in a positive, humane and expeditious manner." In the declaration it was also pointed out that the requirement of financial provision entails a legally sanctioned discrimination since foreign children whose parents have difficulties on the labour market are denied the right to their parents.²³

The right to asylum

Children whose application for asylum is submitted with those of their family are normally dealt with alongside the family and aided by designated counsel who should bring up the reasons for leave to remain for all the family members. But the child has a right to be heard, the grounds for asylum of the child should be assessed and the decision makers have an obligation to weigh the best interests of the child into the assessment of the case as a whole. Children's grounds for being granted leave to remain need not always be as serious and weighty as those of adults, especially in relation to pressing needs (such as illness, ties to Sweden, etc.).

Unaccompanied minors, in addition to designated counsel for the asylum case, have the right to a designated representative who, in place of the parent, should deal with the child's concerns.

The share of the children applying for asylum in Sweden who are finally granted leave to remain has been high for many years. However, being a child

²² Declaration 07.02.08.

²³ "Bin the plans for requirements on financial provision for family reunification" [= Skrota planerna på försörjningskrav vid anhörginvandring], Rädta Barnent 01.06.08.

is not grounds for asylum *per se* and generally practice is strict on which grounds are considered as grounds for asylum. Most children who are allowed to stay are admitted for so-called humanitarian reasons (earlier legislation) or exceptionally distressing circumstances (present legislation), for instance by ties to Sweden after a long stay. Many of them were initially rejected at first instance.

It is common for asylum investigations in relation to children to focus on “distressing circumstances” rather than the grounds for asylum²⁴. For unaccompanied minors the investigations are often initially about such matters as age, the itinerary and where the parents are, even if grounds for asylum are also addressed. However, according to the *travaux préparatoires* of the Aliens Act the emphasis in an asylum case should be on the need for protection, also in relation to children.

In addition to the right to a designated representative unaccompanied minors are protected by several other rules: They should be placed in family homes or youth homes with adult support, their asylum applications should be dealt with in priority with the guideline that a decision should be made within three months. Their application for asylum should be assessed in the EU country where they have relations or where it is submitted. The transfer rules of the “Dublin Regulation” are thus not to be applied in the same way as with adults. Those whose applications for asylum are rejected are normally not returned to the country of origin until they have turned 18 if they cannot be received by someone responsible for the care of the child.

Save the Children on grounds for asylum

Save the Children has published several reports on children’s grounds for asylum, of which the latest is quoted in Chapter 2 of this report²⁵. The reception of unaccompanied minors has also been specifically investigated in several reports from Save the Children, as is reflected in the bibliography. For this reasons we will not enter into these big discussions here. We will limit ourselves to mentioning some of the conclusions drawn in the latest mapping by Save the Children of children’s own grounds for asylum. These conclusions were, among other things, that the authorities of the Swedish asylum process lack knowledge of children’s rights and how these can be violated. When children tell about violations of rights these are often assessed with reference to the rule on exceptionally distressing circumstances rather than as grounds for asylum. Children also find it difficult to be assessed as individuals; they tend to be assessed with reference to the grounds of their parents. Another issue to transpire from the mapping was that in a majority of the children’s cases no real assessment of the best interests of the child was made – something which is not only in contravention with the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also with provisions in the Aliens Act. Many of the children in the mapping were not heard in any way. In order for the children to be properly assessed it is of course a necessity for authorities also really to

²⁴ “New system – old failings?” [= *Nytt system – gamla brister*], *Rädda Barnen* 2008.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

listen to what the child says and make proper and thorough assessments of what the children have told.

Save the Children on the Dublin Regulation and age assessments

There is reason to mention a few special areas within asylum law which have become important mainly for unaccompanied minors, namely transfers in accordance with the Dublin Regulation and age assessments.

The position of Save the Children is that the best interests of the child should determine whether unaccompanied minors should be allowed to apply for asylum in Sweden. In a memo from January 2008²⁶ Lars Carlsson, head of Save the Children's Sweden projects, and Save the Children lawyer Monica Jacobsson state that children can be transferred to a country where they risk detention or where they have been exposed to abuse or suffered harm in other ways, that children can be sent away from Sweden despite being in care and/or are being treated in Sweden or despite already having spent several years on the run. This is unnecessary since the Dublin Regulation leave states free to make exceptions. Sweden can, without violating the regulation, assess applications for asylum from unaccompanied minors when this would be to in the best interests of the child even if a previous application for asylum from the child has been submitted in another country.

Some of the problematic transfers concern Greece, whose suitability as a receiving country generally has been questioned by the UNHCR. In April of 2008 the UNHCR implored the other EU countries to refrain from transfers to Greece until further notice²⁷. The criticism has started partly from the fact that individuals returned are not given access to a complete asylum process, partly from reports on arbitrary detention and abuse of detained asylum seekers – even children. Save the Children is one of the organisations that have demanded that Sweden until further notice cease with transfers to Greece²⁸.

The Migration Board has not followed the UNHCR recommendation but decided, in May of 2008, to cease transfers of minors to Greece until further notice. In a letter Save the Children drew the attention of the director of the Migration Board Dan Eliasson to the risk of minors despite this being transferred to Greece on the basis of incorrect age assessments²⁹. In the letter the problems which have appeared when age assessments are made in relation to hits in other EU countries are described. Save the Children pointed out that the Migration Board handbook is unfortunately formulated on this issue and needs immediate review. Save the Children are also of the opinion that there needs to be a clear framework for how age assessments should be carried out and that age assessments, in view of their serious legal effects, must be subject to appeal.

²⁶ *Lars Carlsson and Monica Jacobsson, 22.01.08.*

²⁷ *UNHCR Position on the Return of Asylum-seekers to Greece under the "Dublin Regulation", 15.04.08.*

²⁸ *Monica Jacobsson, declaration 08.05.08.*

²⁹ *Lars Carlsson, letter of 30.05.08.*

9. Project description

Utanpapper was started in 2005 as a three-year project. In 2008 – after an extra six months – we can state that the project had achieved most of its objectives both in relation to direct support and in making undocumented children visible. This section is about the project as such, including exchange of experiences and lobbying. There are still children living without papers in Sweden, but we know more about them and have a better basis for attacking the problems.

In the project plan from 2004 two objectives were set out:

- to reach approximately 100 undocumented children per year in Sweden and 1-2 other European countries by creating a “lifeline” consisting of professional counselling via telephone/e-mail and personal encounters.³⁰
- to organise at least one seminar per year in order to exchange experiences with other actors and to raise the issue of the responsibility for the circumstances of the children at the national as well as the EU levels.

In the same document the following tasks were also set out:

- to assist, support and help children who live without permission in Sweden and Europe.
- to make the children living “irregularly” visible.
- to seek knowledge on how the attitudes and regulations of different countries affect the life conditions of these children.

Through Save the Children’s company cooperation the project could be financed by two private companies: the seasoning company Santa Maria and the investment company Ratos. The project was assumed to continue for three years of which the first was set aside for preparatory work.

The background to the setting up of *Utanpapper.nu* was the experience –from Save the Children Sweden as well as from the cooperation within SCEP, Separated Children in Europe Programme – that children are living outside the regular safety net due to their lacking leave to remain in the country where they are.

Morten Hjorth Jahnsen, active at Save the Children Denmark, was retained to do a pre-study, eventually entitled Children without protection in Europe. The study was completed in early 2005. Professionals and volunteers in three countries, Spain, Poland and Sweden, were interviewed about the situation of migrating children and whether a helpline could be a way to reach the children.

The pre-study focused on migrating children without adult relatives. In the project plan for the Swedish activities which was created roughly at the same time refugee families are mentioned but even there the emphasis was on

³⁰ The project plan uses the expression “undocumented children”.

unaccompanied minors. A seminar around the pre-study was organised in April of 2005.

During the second half of 2005 a more operational preparatory phase began in Sweden. Sanna Vestin was hired as project coordinator. She sought out a number of actors, among others within the refugee movement and churches, in order to gain a concrete idea of which children we could reach and the problems we could face. In December of 2005 the seminar Support for children without leave to remain [= *Stöd till barn utan uppehållstillstånd*] was organised for experienced individuals within the NGO and health care sector. Around 30 people participated. At the same time research for the construction of a website with information directed at undocumented children was conducted.

Already at this stage there was the realisation that a helpline for undocumented children would in all likelihood also be used by children in families and that it would be unreasonable to exclude these children from the helpline.

The widening of the target group

In conjunction with the opening of the website on 21 March 2006 information was issued to volunteer organisations. Folders on the helpline were printed in the languages of the website, i.e. Swedish, English, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Chinese.

The target group was widened by virtue of the fact that in practice the boundary has not been drawn at 18 as stated in the project plan. Even young adults, many of whom had come to Sweden before turning 18, have been able to get support. We have not had the impression that the young people aged 18-25 who have contacted the helpline have tried to gain favour by pretending to be children. The conversations were often initiated with "I'm an adult, can I ask a question anyway?" These young people have been forced to grow up early, but many are still childishly sensitive and seek adult contact.

Another unforeseen target group are the siblings and parents of children who have stayed behind in the country of origin or have got stuck in a transit country.

After the helpline had been open for just shy of a year a discussion was held on the possibility of reaching more children in trafficking and in begging bands. This was done through renewed meetings with a number of different actors within the police, social services and the church as well as with committed individuals outside the institutions. One result was that we started to spread information about the project among volunteers who meet unaccompanied minors – knowing that these children are at risk of abuse, not least those who abscond after the rejection of their asylum application. This led to more unaccompanied minors making contact.

The corresponding information through social secretaries and gaolers has not led to any direct contacts with children in trafficking. This seems to be partly because of the relatively small size of the group, and partly because these children do not see themselves as help seekers in relation to Swedish

organisations or authorities. Most foreign minors arrested for shoplifting or begging seem to be in Sweden for a short time in the company of parents or other adults. Few foreign minors have been identified in prostitution³¹.

Direct support

The emphasis of the project has been on direct support such as conversations with the help seekers and measures on their behalf, generally conversations and correspondence with other persons and institutions. Viewed in terms of labour intensity this helpline, where concrete measures are taken for the children, is incomparable to such telephone support which only consists of listening and perhaps offering some advice.

The flow of new contacts was continuously on the increase following the opening of the helpline until it peaked in the early autumn of 2007. Thereafter the pace settled, partly because the opening hours were reduced to two hours per day. Disregarding the foreign contacts, we have since that time had on average 15 new contacts in relation to 20-25 children and adolescents per month. The extent of each contact varies from a single conversation or answered e-mail – to continued conversations and measures on behalf of a single child several times a week for several months. Some twenty children and adolescents have been received for counselling at the Save the Children Centre for children and adolescents in crisis.

The number of visitors to the website has stood at around 1,500-2,000 per month. The average time of stay is approximately two minutes. In the internet world this is a relatively high number which indicates that many visitors stay and partake of the information.

The contacts made from help seekers in Sweden were in relation to approximately 470 children and young adults (approximately 380 children and 90 young adults). In addition there were 283 e-mails from abroad.

The log entries show that the work done on behalf of every single child or family varies dramatically. The family which figures most frequently in the log book has given rise to entries from 140 different dates during two years. At the same time there are, among the Sweden contacts, almost one hundred which have not given rise to more than a single entry.

In order that the team members should cope it has been necessary to maintain a clear structure for the sorting of e-mails, the division of labour, priorities and determination of which help seekers should be referred to others, etc., as well as recurring opportunities for discussing those problems which have appeared in the conversations with children and parents – and for formulating your own reactions. This has been effected on the one hand through regular consultation within the group with the team psychotherapist Mario Morrone,

³¹ See Svante Weyler "The Frail Chain – Support for Child Victims of Trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region", Council of Baltic Sea States. From this paper it transpires that the informants in countries on the other side of the Baltic Sea report trafficking of children as being more common than what it has been possible to confirm in Sweden.

on the other hand through support conversations when the need has arisen with the project leader Monica Brendler-Lindqvist and other psychotherapists at the Save the Children Centre for children and adolescents in crisis.

The number of “prank e-mails” has been negligible, some three for the whole period. A further few individuals have questioned the purpose of the project by e-mail and were given informative replies.

Networking

It is part of the project mission to prepare and update the website www.utanapper.nu. In addition to the pages about children’s rights, the website contains a fact data base where information from authorities and organisations have been posted continuously as well as press cuttings concerning children without leave to remain. The target group is others who come into contact with these children, professionally or as volunteers. The project reports and materials from seminars are also collected here. Select parts are published in a newsletter which, this far, has been published in 23 editions. The subscribers consist of school and health care staff and individuals in Save the Children local associations.

Documentation from help organisations in other countries as well as from international cooperative projects relating to trafficking, the situation of undocumented individuals, etc., is also included in the fact data base.

Two months after the opening of the website *Utanapper* organised a seminar aimed at school staff and others who meet undocumented children in the exercise of their profession. Group work was organised around scenarios, based on real cases, to discuss the dilemmas you may face when attempting to provide support to children in a lawless situation. The lectures on rights and rules of confidentiality were documented in the report *Helping undocumented children – balancing particular needs and discrimination [= Att hjälpa barn utan papper – en balansgång mellan särskilda behov och discriminering]*. Around 40 people participated in the seminar.

The following year a broader seminar was organised about supporting and cooperation on behalf of children in hiding. It was aimed at individuals who in various settings meet children without leave to remain and try to provide them with support. Around 60 people participated, mainly health care personnel, staff from shelters and volunteers from various help organisations. During the seminar among other things how support persons themselves can be affected by and react to contacts with individuals in crisis was discussed. A panel of children and adolescents who had themselves lived in hiding told of that situation and how they had been affected by how they had been treated by adults. The seminar was documented in the report *Undocumented children – Children first and foremost [= Barn utan papper – Barn först och främst]*.

Both reports were diffused widely and are now only available in pdf-format³².

³² *Helping undocumented children – balancing particular needs and discrimination [= Att hjälpa barn utan papper – en balansgång mellan särskilda behov och discriminering]*,

E-mails and telephone calls from professionals, students and volunteers who have asked general questions about undocumented children and their rights but which have not aimed to provide direct support for any specific child have increased from a few during the first season to a couple per week during the project's final months. That type of requests have not been entered into the log book and therefore does not appear in the statistics over direct support.

Utanpapper participates in the network for care for undocumented individuals which has drawn attention to how the legislation collides with medical ethics and has made suggestions for changes. The team members have contributed experiences of how children can be excluded despite being entitled to all care under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Information and lobbying

In addition to the concrete aims mentioned above there was at the start a more long-term vision for the project:

That all children living without permission in Europe should be guaranteed their rights – protection against violence, abuse and exploitation, the right to education and development and the right to health care – through clear acceptance of responsibility at the national and EU levels³³.

Part of the ambition is therefore not only direct support but also lobbying to change legislation, regulation and practice which have negative consequences for undocumented children in Sweden and Europe. At the basis for this is the knowledge and experience gained through direct work with children, adolescents and families.

The lobbying there has been partly as a result of current events. An example of this is that in the early autumn of 2007 several entreaties arrived from different directions on undocumented children in certain municipalities systematically being denied schooling. We tried to bring attention to this and the result was news items in several media. *Utanpapper* also took the initiative to Save the Children producing an information sheet and a guide for local associations. Save the Children wrote a letter to members of parliament with tips on introducing bills on all children's right to schooling.

In a similar way *Utanpapper* has since then initiated or produced supporting documentation for the positions of Save the Children in relation to transfers under the Dublin Regulation, family reunification/family break-up, care for undocumented individuals and age assessments.

Project team member have on some occasions been invited to meetings with members of parliament or members of inquiries who have wanted to be informed on the situation of undocumented individuals, mainly in relation to schooling and access to health care. We have also participated with appeals at

Rädda Barnen 2006; *Undocumented children – Children first and foremost* [= *Barn utan papper – Barn först och främst*], *Rädda Barnen 2007*.

³³ *From an internal project plan, Rädda Barnen 2005*.

external events organised by the network for care for undocumented individuals mentioned above.

On UN day, 24 October, of 2007 *Utanpapper* organised a seminar on migrating children, Undocumented children are also children [= *Barn utan papper är också barn*] which had a wider perspective than the direct support work. Liz Fekete from the Institute of Race Relations in Great Britain gave a lecture on how children are affected by the EU's measures in migration policy and Shahram Khosravi from the University of Stockholm related the results from his investigation into the conditions of undocumented individuals in Sweden. A report on children in migration, *Child Migration – the Construction of Vulnerability* – produced by the researcher Julia O'Connell commissioned by Save the Children was presented alongside the experiences from *Utanpapper*. The seminar, which attracted almost 100 participants, was concluded with a panel discussion with the participation of politicians from several parties.

Project team members have been interviewed and told about the situation for undocumented children in some 30 media, including TV and radio programmes as well as different sections of the national, regional and professional press. The items have consisted of everything from short comments to longer investigations. The team has also contributed information for reports from the Youth Council and the Council of Baltic Sea States and for several dissertations and books on undocumented or refugee children.

Sanna Vestin and Tyko Granberger have participated with lectures and workshops at some ten seminars organised by Save the Children in different places and on the premises of other organisations. The meetings organised by Save the Children have been aimed at members as well as of a more external character. At the member meetings where we have participated at both national and regional level (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Östersund) experiences from the helpline were presented, but the participants were also given the opportunity to discuss their own experiences of how you can support undocumented children through volunteer social work. There were argumentation exercises such as debating and writing letters to the editor on some issues. One current topic was the schooling of undocumented children.

Examples of external local activities where *Utanpapper* have participated are a seminar in conjunction with a photograph exhibition at *Medelhavsmuseet* [= Mediterranean museum] in Stockholm on fleeing children, a lecture at a seminar organised by the asylum group (FARR) in Borlänge on children's grounds for asylum and participating at some of the recurring external seminars organised every six months by the care network Rosengrenska in Gothenburg.

Team members have also participated in some ten smaller meetings with local Save the Children associations, asylum groups and undocumented individuals. These meetings were often motivated by the activities of the local association and their contacts with undocumented children.

Utanpapper has not made direct representations to undocumented children in other European countries even if we have had a few such contacts. The European cooperation has mainly been through the exchange of experiences with individuals within Save the Children in other countries. In January of 2008 the experiences from *Utanpapper* were presented at a large conference organised by the Red Cross and *Stadsmissionen* in Oslo aiming to start support activities for undocumented individuals.

Exchange of experiences has also taken place via connections within SCEP, Separated Children in Europe Programme, and Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region within the Council of Baltic Sea States. This has taken place through participation in conferences and also by these organisations being represented in the *Utanpapper* reference group. During the latter part of the project the experiences have also been shared within PICUM, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, which is currently working on a project to map undocumented children's circumstances in Europe. This has taken place, among other things, through a presentation of the conditions of undocumented children in Sweden at a conference in Brussels in April of 2008³⁴.

From all this can be concluded that the aims in the initial project plan have been amply achieved in almost all aspects.

Concluding work

According to the original plans the project was due to be concluded at the end of 2007-beginning of 2008. However, the plans were put back somewhat so that the helpline was opened a few months later than planned. The great flow of cases led to there not being room for as much external information and lobbying aimed at politicians and decision makers as had been planned. In addition the helpline had not been open for as long as had been intended. For these reasons the project applied for financing also for 2008. Santa Maria, one of the companies which had financed the project from the start, added funds which enabled the helpline to be kept open for a few months and thereafter for the team to dedicate some time to documentation and external work as well as producing and distributing this report.

During the final period after the closing down on 21 March 2008, the team stayed in contact with some 30 adolescents and families for as long as needed or until other support persons could take over the contact. At the time of writing in August 2008, four adolescents and four families with children are still in treatment at the Centre for children and adolescents in crisis.

Political awakening

During the three years that have passed since the practical work with *Utanpapper* was initiated in August of 2005 the topic of "undocumented individuals" has undergone a dramatic change in the public conscience and

³⁴ See Report of the Second Workshop on Fighting Discrimination-Based Violence Against Undocumented Children, Picum 2008.

debate. The Save the Children project *Utanpapper* was a pioneering effort started at a time when support for individuals without leave to remain for most people implied limited support for refugees. That other groups of undocumented individuals could have rights was a non-issue for most people, even though the syndicalists had started to enrol undocumented individuals and care networks had quietly started to work.

Today the situation is radically different. The expression “papperslös” (undocumented) has had a breakthrough and an intense debate rages on all levels and in several disciplines on undocumented individuals and their human rights. If the syndicalists three years ago were the only trade union which were at all attentive to undocumented individuals, today the giants LO and TCO are the ones debating how to relate to them. Even in coverage from other countries the concepts crops up – undocumented individuals are being written about in the US, in Europe, in Asia... Undocumented individuals have organised themselves in Sweden and are there as actors and negotiating partners. The increase in reporting and discussion has been easy to follow in the fact data base on www.utanpapper.nu.

Representatives of government are now facing strong demands to include undocumented individuals when the conditions of foreigners are set out in law. The schools minister has said that this should happen when children in hiding gain the right to schooling, the social services minister has said that this should happen also within the care sector. However, the parties in government are not united on these issues which is why discussions and awareness raising will continue.

During the approximately two years the project has run the awareness of children's rights has grown among health care and school staff. It is more a matter of course for staff to find a solution when an undocumented child needs care or schooling today than it was two years ago.

Also within Save the Children the support for children in hiding has gone from something you provided in secret to becoming something which the chairman Inger Ashing, upon entering her functions in 2008, presents as one of the most important tasks³⁵.

Save the Children is not the only part to have contributed to the political awakening in relation the validity of human rights for everyone even in Sweden. But *Utanpapper* has been one of the forces which have had an impact, not least in gaining attention for the fact that children can be undocumented.

Whilst it is possible to speak of an awakening when it comes to children's rights, the debate is characterised by an ignorance of history concerning the isolation and wellbeing of children in hiding. The way children in hiding live and fare have been the subjects of investigations and reports both from authorities and NGOs time after time since 1994 when the National Board of Health and Welfare and the then Department of Aliens published the first of

³⁵ Interview by Ossi Carp, *Dagens Nyheter*, 02.06.08.

several joined reports on children in hiding³⁶. Another important publication on children in hiding was published by Save the Children in cooperation with the Swedish Association of Paediatricians after a hearing in parliament in 2003³⁷. There are also a number of dissertations and research reports on the subject. If talk of an awakening is appropriate in this context, politicians and the general public must have gone back to sleep time after time.

The fact that insights have been forgotten and the interest has varied for the situation of undocumented children in Sweden can partly be because numbers have varied. During periods where few asylum applications have been rejected and decisions concerning many families with children have provided for re-assessments the number of individuals in hiding has decreased. During periods where more applications for asylum have been rejected, more people have again gone into hiding. The correlation no doubt works both ways between the varying degree of interest and the varying number of children in hiding. Attention around the subject of children in hiding has given rise to streams of opinion which in turn have led to positive decisions followed by a decrease in interest. The latest example is the temporary law adopted in 2005 on re-assessment of expulsion decisions and which enabled thousands of people to regularise their stay. The law was adopted following a large grassroots campaign initiated by the church against an asylum policy perceived to have been too harsh on children. When the law entered into force, popular ire subsided.

The experiences of *Utanpapper* on how the children feel presented in this report are thus not news but well-known facts, facts which we have confirmed through our direct contacts with children, parents and support persons. That is why we in this and previous reports have placed great emphasis on the experiences of how undocumented children are to gain information and find support, something which is less developed in previous investigations and reports.

Final words

With insight into the results of the asylum policies of previous periods it is worrying that increasing numbers of applications for asylum are rejected. After a “honeymoon” with the Aliens Act of 2005, the proportion of rejections has again increased greatly, even in relation to unaccompanied minors. All the experience suggests that this will be followed by more staying in Sweden without documentation. At the same time even Sweden sees an increase in the undocumented population resulting from global injustices and people’s wish to change their lives and to make a living despite the structures preventing them from doing so by legal means.

Whatever your position on these problems and their solution may be it is impossible to view undocumented children as a temporary mistake which does

³⁶ *In hiding – to avoid expulsion [= Gömd – för att undvika avvisning], Invandrarverket 1994. Follow-up reports were published in 1999 and 2001.*

³⁷ *Cajsa Malmström, Children without residence permits [= Barn utan uppehållstillstånd], Rädda Barnen 2003.*

not require handling. The children are here now and their numbers are rising. Their childhood cannot be put on hold any more than other children's childhoods.

One insight from *Utanpapper* which is not new but which cannot be repeated enough is the centrality of admitting all children into schools and day care centres.

Another insight for Save the Children and other NGOs is that it may be of great importance for children and adolescents to be given access to other social contexts and adults they can relate to – beyond the obvious that they are allowed to go to school. A central help function could in this case have as its most important role the provision of contacts, the explanation of rules and rights and to serve as a sounding board both for the children and for the adults who meet them locally.

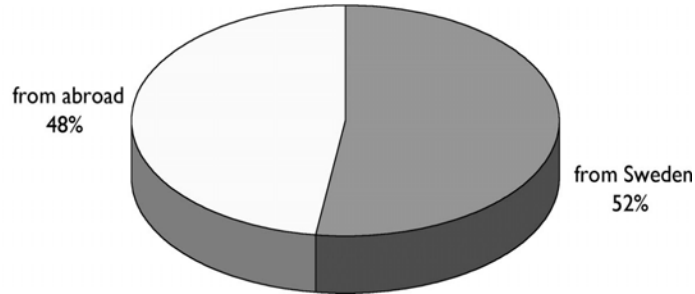
The *Utanpapper* project has been very important in several individual cases when it has been a question of highlighting a child's grounds for asylum, bringing attention to the social situation of children, making sure that children have their rights seen to, etc. – generally seeing the children and cooperating with other actors who help undocumented individuals but who do not have the same competence. The project has also given direct access for children and adolescents to knowledgeable adults via the telephone and the internet. Another special thing has been the directed information on the website, which is useful also to support persons.

If the direct support has been the most important thing for the individual children who have been given support through *Utanpapper*, the lobbying through networks and contacts with politicians and opinion makers have been all the more important for all the children who have not been reached by this project but who in future, it is hoped, will not be able to be excluded from health care, schooling and other social rights.

I 0. Statistics

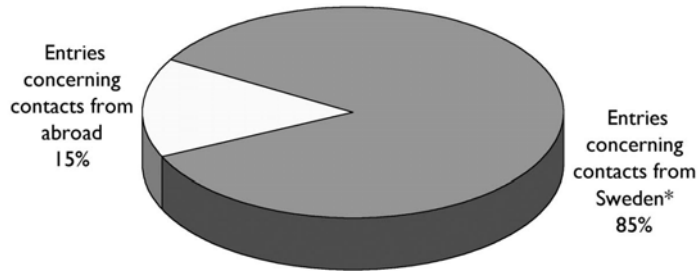
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I. Distribution of contacts from Sweden and abroad



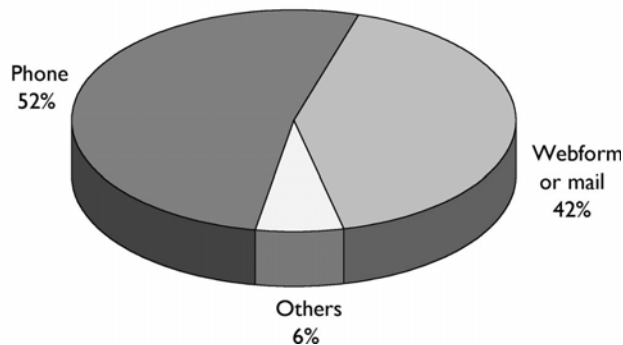
Graphs I and II show the shares of new requests to the helpline made from Sweden and from abroad respectively. Graph I shows that the share of e-mails from abroad has been relatively large. The picture is different if we compare numbers of entries in the log book (which is the same as the number of days the individual or the family has been of concern). Graph II shows that the same effort has not been dedicated to the foreign e-mails as the contacts from Sweden. By “contacts” is in this context meant family units.

II. Share of entries concerning contacts from Sweden /abroad



* Some of these concern more than one separated child

III. Method of first contact



IV. Countries of origin

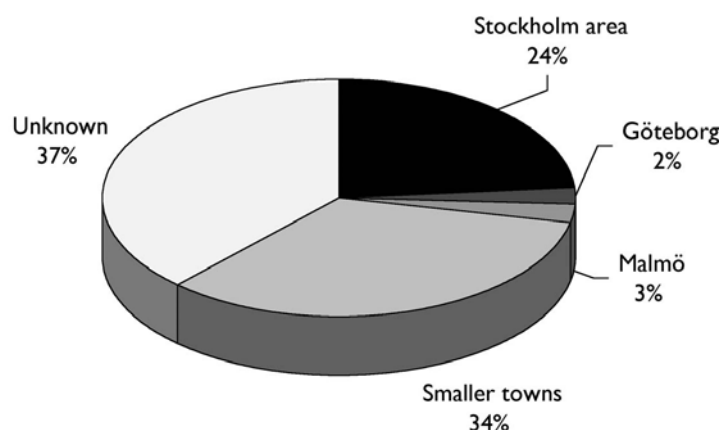
The table concerns contacts made from Sweden (per family unit, total: 310)

Kosovo	14	Turkey	8	Chile	10
Bosnia	9	Iraq	34	Bolivia	9
Serbia	6	Syria	9	Rest of	
Montenegro	4	Lebanon	6	Latin-	
Rest of		Libya	5	America	9
Europe *	6	Rest of		Rest	
Azerbaijan	13	Middle East	11	Spanish**	9
Russia	12	Rest Arabic**	12	China	4
Belarus	4	Somalia	5	Mongolia	4
Rest ex-Soviet	10	DR Congo	3	Rest of	
Rest		Nigeria	3	Far Asia	6
Russian**	3	Rest of		Unknown	
Afghanistan	19	Southern		country	45
Iran	8	Africa	10		

* EU countries have been included in Europe, not ex-Soviet Union.

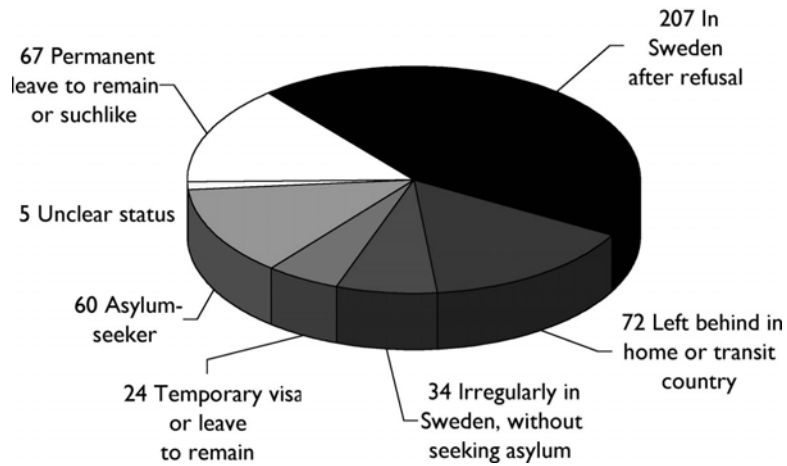
** "Russian", "Arabic", etc., indicates that we are not aware of the help seeker's country of origin, only the language.

V. Place of residence in Sweden



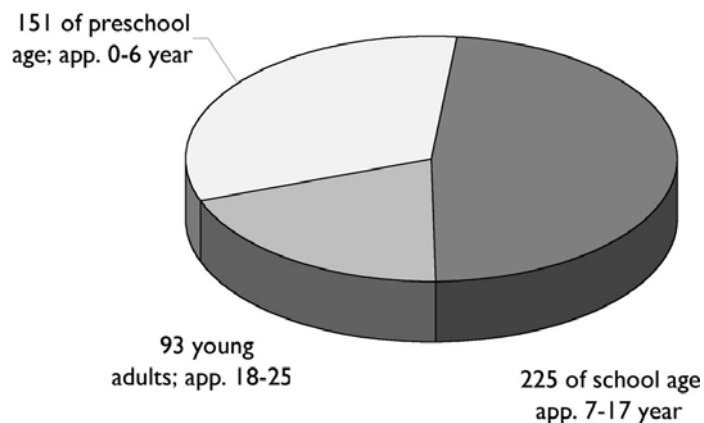
Graph V shows the contacts made from Sweden, calculated per family unit. A relatively large portion of contacts have been made from smaller localities outside the big cities.

VI. 469 children and adolescents, status on contact



The graphs on this page show the total number of children and adolescents affected by the contacts made from Sweden, 469. The figure is uncertain for some of the families; for this reason a rounded figure (470) is used in the body of the text. Graph VI above shows the legal status on first contact. Some uncertainty persists as the family's status was not always clear to themselves. It is not uncommon for the children in the family to have different status, one child could for instance be in Sweden with leave to remain or in hiding, one sibling could still be in the country of origin.

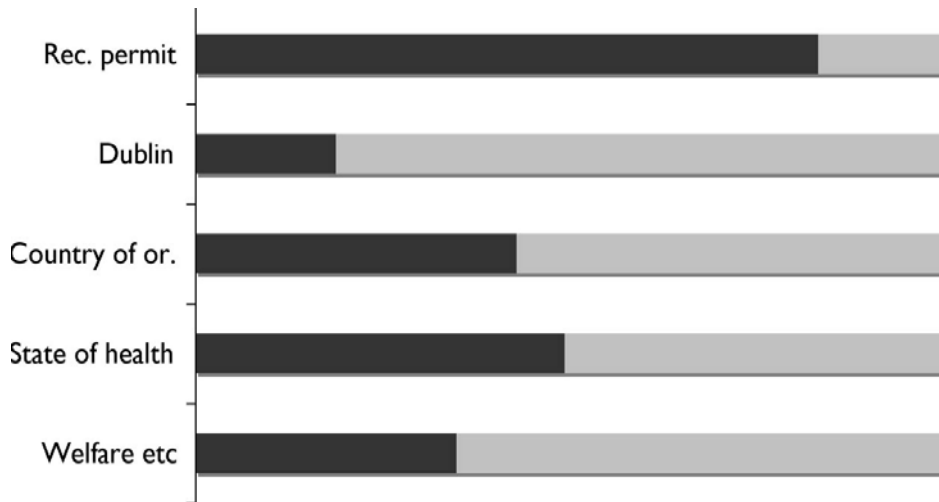
VII. 469 children and adolescents, age distribution



VIII. 318 school children and young adults, gender distribution

	7-17 years old	18-25 years old
Boys	77	45
Girls	75	39
Unknown	73	9

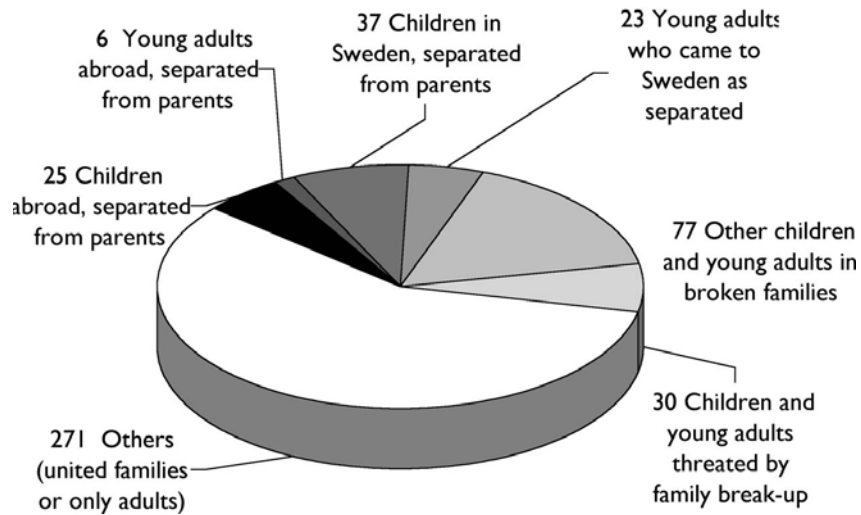
IX. Common problems



The black columns in graph IX show the proportion of children with certain types of problems according to their own, relatives' or support persons' information. The proportions are calculated only with reference to information about the contacts which have led to entries in the log book on at least five different dates. This selection comprises 187 children and young adults.

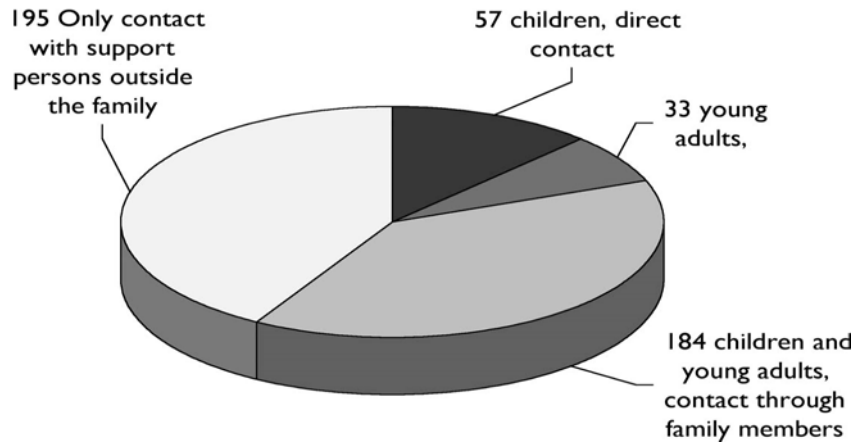
- Recidence permit:** Leave to remain, expulsion or family reunification.
- Dublin:** Dublin Regulation, i.e. transfer to another EU country.
- Country of origin:** Violence or threats against the child in the country of origin, other child related complications in the country of origin, children's lack of health care in the country of origin.
- State of health:** Children's state of health, psychological reactions, isolation, etc.
- Welfare, etc:** Children's access to healthcare, school, pre-school/day care centre, etc.

X. 198 out of 469 children and adolescents are affected by family break-up



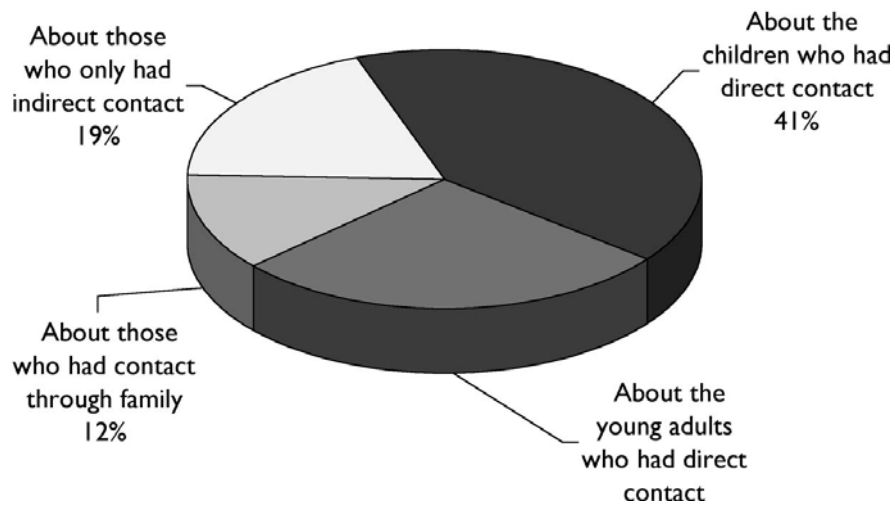
Graph X shows the number whose families have been broken up. The four darkest categories, in total approximately 20 per cent, are made up of children and adolescents separated from both parents.

XI. 469 children and adolescents, direct/indirect contact

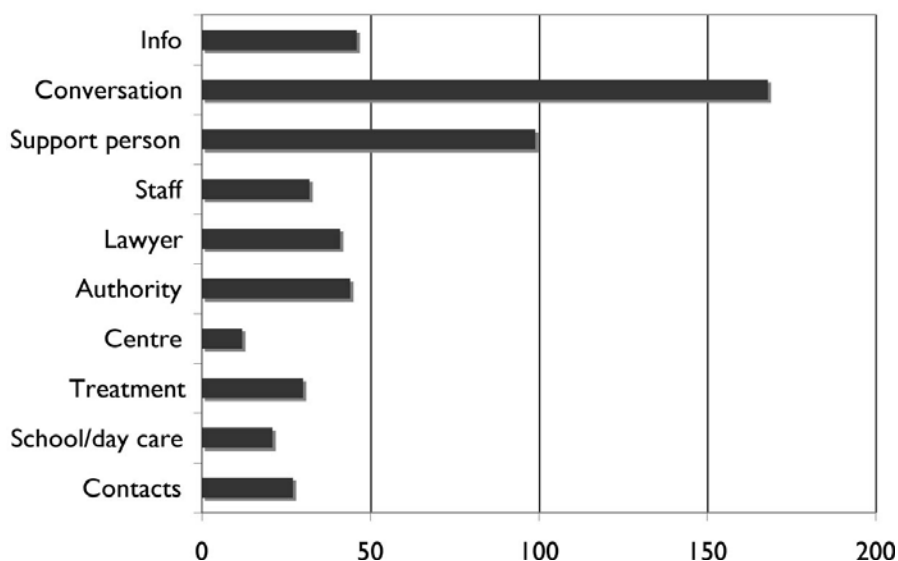


Graph XI shows that we have been in direct contact with approximately 20 per cent of the children affected by the contacts made from Sweden. Diagram XII below shows that no less than 70 per cent of log entries (on Sweden contacts) concern precisely these cases. This reflects the fact that direct contacts with children and adolescents have entailed more contact time and more interventions than other contacts. The total number of log book entries on Sweden contacts is 2046.

XII. Entries on direct/indirect contacts



XIII. Conversations and other measures



Graph XIII details the number of adolescents, families and support persons who have had conversational contact with or received various types of support from *Utanpapper*. The calculation is made per family unit, which means that more individual children and adolescents are affected. The selection is constituted by all of the 310 contacts made from Sweden.

- Info:** Solely answer to a specific question or referral to another organisation.
- Conversation:** Direct conversation with child and/or parent on the telephone, via e-mail or by visit.
- Support person:** Consultation with support person in NGO or such.
- Staff:** Consultation with school or health care staff, social worker or such.
- Lawyer:** Consultation with lawyer. Includes 13 cases where we have referred to lawyer.
- Authority:** Consultation with case officer at Migration Board, police or such.
- Centre:** Treatment at Save the Children Centre for Children and adolescents in crisis.
- Treatment:** Referred to other treatment.
- School/day care:** Admission to school or day care centre through our referrals.
- Contacts:** Help with social contacts or other local support.

Recommended reading

Reports from Utanpapper

Children without protection in Europe by Morten Hjorth Jahnsen. Rädda Barnen 2005.

Att hjälpa barn utan papper - en balansgång mellan särskilda behov och diskriminering by Cajsa Unnbom & Sanna Vestin. Documentation from seminar, Rädda Barnen 2006.

Barn utan papper – Barn först och främst by Anna Waldehorn. Report from one year with the helpline and documentation from seminar, Rädda Barnen 2007.

Undocumented Children in Sweden by Sanna Vestin. The report from the first year with the helpline www.utanpapper.nu in English. Rädda Barnen 2007.

Other Save the Children publications

Barn utan uppehållstillstånd by Cecilia Malmström. Report from hearing in parliament, Rädda Barnen and Svenska Barnläkarföreningen 2003.

De gömda barnen oskyldigt drabbade by Sevil Bremer & Monica Brendler-Lindqvist. *Psykologtidningen* nr 8, 2004.

Att möta de ensamkommande barnen and Vem tar ansvaret för de ensam-kommande barnen? by Monica Brendler-Lindqvist. Rädda Barnen 2004 and 2005.

Child Migration and the Construction of Vulnerability by Julia O'Connell Davidson och Caitlin Farrow (in English). Rädda Barnen 2007.

The reports on children's grounds for asylum: *Barns egna asylskäl 2003* by Karin Juhlén,

Barns egna asylskäl 2005 by Eva Rimsten and *Nytt system, gamla brister* by Lars Olsson. Rädda Barnen 2003, 2005 and 2008 respectively.

Miscellaneous publications

Skolgång för barn som skall avvisas eller utvisas (SOU 2007:34). Public inquiry contains an overview of today's regulations.

Flyktingfällan by Sanna Vestin. Ordfront 2006.

Asylexistensens villkor: Resurser och problem i meningsskapande hos asylsökande barn i Sverige by Åsa Löwén. Uppsala Universitet 2006.

Socialtjänsten och barn till irreguljära immigranter: en rättsvetenskaplig undersökning by Karin Österling. Stockholms universitet 2007.

They are Children Too by Liz Fekete (in English). Institute of Race Relations 2007.
(www.irr.org)

Access to Health Care for Undocumented Migrants in Europe. PICUM 2007.
(www.picum.org)

The Frail Chain – Support for Child Victims of Trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region
by Svante Weyler. Östersjörådet 2008.

De papperslösa och de aningslösa by Kristina Mattsson. Leopard förlag 2008.
RITA – Rättvis ingång till arbete by Anna Holmgren. Fastighetsanställdas förbund
2007.

PICUM workshop report on the protection of undocumented children. PICUM 2008.
(www.picum.org)

Ny utlänningslag under lupp by Rebecca Stern. Röda Korset 2008.

*Nu känner jag mig som en del av världen – En studie om ungas liv idag och deras
erfarenheter av att tidigare ha levt gömda* by Karin Andersson & Johanna Korol, Cuppsats
Göteborgs Universitet 2008.

Save the Children fights for children's rights.
We deliver immediate and lasting improvements
to children's lives worldwide.



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