

BOOKLETS FROM
THE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF SWEDEN - #22B



This Is What We Want

– The Churches and Migration Issues

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This booklet was first published in 2007 and is now republished in a revised edition. It is written by the Christian Council of Sweden's Group on Migration and integration.

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This Is What We Want – the Churches and Migration Issues
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Introduction: This Is What We Want – the Churches and Migration Issues

OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH has been moulded by exile and experiences of fleeing. When we find exhortations to treat the stranger well in the biblical texts own experiences are referred to: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not vex him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be counted as a native among you. You shall love him as yourself. You yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19: 33-34). Jesus himself experienced the refugee’s fate as a child and grew up in an occupied country, with a foreign language and a foreign culture. Jesus shows us through his words and deeds the example of love; to love one’s neighbour and to pay special heed to the poor, the powerless and those subjected to discrimination. To welcome the stranger into the community is an act of Christian faith that bears a promise of blessing: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” (Hebrews 13:2)

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES in Sweden - as well as throughout the world – have been involved in migration issues in different ways for a long time. This involvement is primarily expressed through support to people seeking out our churches – for example, when in need of someone to talk to, or for orientation on legal or judicial matters or for concrete support or contact through our outreach activities, such as visiting the Migration Agency’s asylum accommodation and detention centres. Migration is very much a phenomenon that knows no national boundaries. Christian churches in Sweden are working through their international development aid for a world where people are not forced to flee

their homes. We are also active in humanitarian efforts in refugee camps and among vulnerable migrant workers.

THE CHURCH’S TASK is to analyse developments in society and “read the signs of the times” so as to contribute to positive social development, which means working for a welcoming and inclusive society. Therefore, we continue to speak out¹ and will continue to examine legislative, political and legal practice and the authorities’ work in the field of migration policy in a critical and constructive manner. We do this not only from a national Swedish perspective but also from a European and a global perspective. On certain occasions the churches have initiated petitions for a humane migration policy. 157,251 persons signed a petition in the spring of 2005 entitled “The Easter proclamation” which contributed to a decision in the Swedish parliament that gave many persons threatened with expulsion a new opportunity to obtain a residence permit. At the close of 2016 we launched a petition named “Juluppropet” in support of the right to family reunification and for the right of children and young people to security and to a future.

“THIS IS WHAT WE WANT – THE CHURCHES AND MIGRATION ISSUES” is an expression of our ambition to be the salt of the earth, to protest against injustice and to work for a better society for all people. We highlight the fundamental values and ethical principles that are at the foundation of this analysis. These values or principles are based both on our Christian faith, as the text is illustrated with various quotes from the scriptures, and on the international community’s work on human rights illustrated by excerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant conventions.

WE HAVE CHOSEN to focus on migrants who come to Sweden for various reasons. This also includes those who have not applied for asylum.

THE AIM OF this booklet is to be brief and concise – this means that it does not give room for deeper discussions or problematisation of the issues. Our work will continue and provide us with the opportunity for further input, reflection and dialogue.

¹ The website of the Christian Council of Sweden www.skr.org/migration contains more information on what the churches have said and done.

1. All People are Created in God's Image and Have the Right to a Life in Dignity

“So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (1 Gen 1:27)

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 1)

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” (UN Declaration Art 3)

“Everyone has the right in other countries to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.” (UN Declaration Art 14.1)

“No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” (1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 33)

Therefore, we want

- a person's fear and protection needs to be taken more seriously when assessing the grounds for seeking asylum
- persons to be guaranteed never to be sent to countries where they risk being subjected to torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- persons always to be guaranteed not to be sent to a first country of asylum when there is no access to an asylum procedure
- persons who are suffering from life-threatening illnesses such as aggressive HIV to be allowed to stay in Sweden if they do not have the means for or access to treatment in their home countries
- more legal entry possibilities to be introduced to enter Sweden and the European Union to seek asylum
- more to be done to prevent people from being lured to Sweden for sexual exploitation or for work under slave-like conditions

Therefore, we are against

- persons being forced to take dangerous risks trying to enter the EU or to live in misery at the EU borders
- persons being held in custody for long periods when awaiting expulsion from Sweden

Thus, we call on each other

- to support in a respectful manner vulnerable persons who seek asylum in Sweden or who live in Sweden without a formal legal status
- to support persons in their countries of origin through development aid
- to act with greater solidarity and compassion

2. Fundamental Rights Shall Apply to All People

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the God who is great and mighty and fear-inspiring, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He provides the fatherless and the widow, he loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” (Deuteronomy 10: 17-18)

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind such as on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 2)

Therefore, we want

- Sweden to ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families, adopted in 1990 and reaffirmed in the New York Declaration 2016
- the vulnerable position of women and children and their special protection needs to be fully considered in the asylum process
- people staying in Sweden without legal status to be given the same rights to medical care as the general population and not just “care that cannot be deferred”
- revocation of the limitations in the law on reception conditions (LMA) that can lead to a person ending up without any emergency assistance
- public authorities to take responsibility for spreading knowledge to everyone on what freedom of religion and belief mean and what it does not include

Therefore, we are against

- the exploitation in the labour market of persons staying in Sweden without legal status
- adults with a legally enforceable expulsion order risking ending up becoming destitute without any social safety net
- women’s and children’s special protection needs not being respected
- persons who seek asylum and have converted, risking not getting a decision based on facts. They thereby risk being deported to a country where they may face persecution

Thus, we call on each other to

- welcome all people, regardless of their origin, ethnicity and religion, who come to our congregations

3. The Situation of Children and their Needs Must be Given Special Attention

“Let the children come to me and do not hinder them - the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Luke 10:14)

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” (UN Convention on the Rights of Children, art 3)

Therefore, we want

- children to get the opportunity to give an account themselves of their protection grounds, an account which is then examined in a comprehensive manner in accordance with the law and in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- children who have spent a long time in Sweden to be granted a permanent residence permit
- children of EU citizens in a vulnerable situation to be given the right to education
- children never to be used as interpreters for their parents in sensitive conversations
- the Rights of the Child Convention to become Swedish law

Thus, we call on each other

- to put children in focus, especially children who are forced to flee

4. Families Have the Right to Live Together

“Thus, says the Lord of hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” (Zechariah 7: 9-10)

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 16.3)

“Family reunification is a necessary way of making family life possible. It helps to create sociocultural stability facilitating the integration of third country nationals in the Member State, which also serves to promote economic and social cohesion, a fundamental Community objective stated in the Treaty.” (EU Directive 2003/86 of 22 September 2003 on the Right to Family Reunification, the preamble to paragraph 4)

Therefore, we want

- all persons with recognised protection grounds in Sweden to have the right to family reunification
- people to have access to a rapid and legally sound processing of their applications for family reunification
- relatives of people residing in Sweden to have better opportunities to be granted a visitor’s visa

Therefore, we are against

- the limitations of the right to family reunification introduced in the temporary law from 2016

Thus, we call on each other

- to promote the cohesion of families and to be a special support for separated families

5. Everyone Has a Responsibility for Developing a Good Society

“So, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Matthew 5:13)

“Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration.” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 30)

Therefore, we want

- all individuals and social actors to take responsibility for combating racism and all forms of discrimination
- all individuals and social actors to take responsibility for providing people with foreign backgrounds opportunities to enter society, not least through establishment in the labour and housing markets and through associations. This must be done to overcome exclusion and a spiral of violence in certain suburbs and to discourage “ghettoisation”

Therefore, we are against

- biased statements being spread about people based on their origin, colour, religious beliefs or sexual orientation
- restrictive migration policies being blamed on an opinion that is against immigration

Thus, we call on each other to

- contribute to increasing social arenas and show respect for and cooperation with people of different backgrounds and cultural experiences
- be good neighbours where we live and work

6. Our Goal is Peace, Justice and a Sustainable Society - “New heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord.” (Luke 4: 18-19)

“Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 28)

Therefore, we want

- integration to be a mutual process of learning and understanding
- migration policy to be part of the Policy for Global Development (PGD), human rights and lasting peace

Thus, we call on each other

- to support each other with perseverance and joy in working for a better world to live in – for all people!

This Is What We Want

– the Churches and Migration Issues

EVERY SEVENTH PERSON in our world is a migrant. There are approximately 250 million international migrants in the world. Another 750 million are migrants within their own country. Many people are moving across borders of different types. (source: migrationsinfo.se).

MIGRATION OFFERS opportunities and challenges. Some people migrate based on their own desires; too many do it to flee from persecution or other undesirable conditions.

THE SITUATION OF refugees is a key concern for all who wish to be good neighbours. Therefore, it is an issue that requires both a well-reasoned basis and regular reflection.

IN THIS BOOKLET, the churches in Sweden wish to offer a basic view to assess the challenges of migration. Fundamental scriptural texts and references to relevant international conventions are presented. Based on these principles we present several recent illustrations regarding Swedish legislation and practice.

THIS PUBLICATION HAS been produced within the Christian Council of Sweden's Working Group on Migration and Integration, and was adopted by the Board of the Christian Council of Sweden in December 2016.



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