Information Practices of the Refugees and Communication Strategies in the Integration System: The Case of Afghans in Kronoberg County, Sweden

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Abstract

After Sweden, among other European countries, received a record number of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016, the public discussion on integration of newcomers to the Swedish society intensified. One of the important means of such integration, as well as one of the fundamental human rights, is access to relevant information – knowledge refugees need to settle at a new place. This study looks into the information practices of one of the largest group of newcomers to Europe – the Afghans – based on the case of Kronoberg County in the Southern Sweden.

Grounded on Reijo Savolainen’s (2008) theory of everyday information practices, this study applies the combination of McKenzie’s (2003), Mwarigha’s (2002), and Berlo’s (1960) analytical models to explore the informational behavior of asylum seekers and check if it is accommodated in the communication strategies of different agencies involved in the integration process. To reach these objectives, a set of interviews was conducted with both Afghan newcomers and representatives of different governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The results of the conducted research and analysis may be summed up to one major topic. While Swedish reception and integration system is effective in reaching out to the newcomers and providing them with task-related information, the structure of the system impedes the provision of general orienting information and guidance, which is in great demand among the asylum seekers. Therefore, development of a parallel system of information can be noticed, with personal relations and authority of the local opinion leaders in the core of it. It is concluded that such division should not be seen as a threat to the integration of newcomers, rather as a supportive mechanism on its intermediate stage. Still, it is important to promote policies that foster active personal contacts between Swedes and newcomers – for example, mentorship programmes.

Keywords: Refugees, Afghan asylum seekers, integration of migrants, information practices, Sweden.
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ELIS – Everyday life information seeking, refers to one of Savolainen’s theories
HIB – Human information behavior
ICT – Information and communications technologies
MENA – Middle East and North Africa
NGO – Non-governmental organization
OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SFI – Swedish for Immigrants language schools
SMCR – Source-Message-Channel-Recipient, refers to the Berlo’s model of communication
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research problem

Hosting victims of forced migration is neither a new issue, nor one limited to the developed countries, but the recent influx of refugees to Europe has spurred active public and academic discussion. In 2015, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries registered a record inflow of asylum seekers – 1.65 million people, with most of them – 1.3 million – coming to those OECD countries that are located in Europe (OECD, 2016, p. 9). Among these, Sweden received the highest proportion of the asylum seekers to the population – 1.6%, or 156,450 people (Ibid, p.345).

Although the need to receive, accommodate and integrate migrants is a substantial challenge, Sweden is not new to the issue. The rates of immigration to Sweden started to grow in the 1950s, when people from the other Nordic countries and Southern Europe were coming here in search of employment (Nilsson, 2014, p. 116). Swedish multicultural approach to the integration started to get institutionalized in the 1970s, although the first national bill on the integration policy was adopted in 1998, after the influx of migrants from Balkans (Joona Andersson, et al., 2016). The latest large-scale reform of the integration policy was conducted in 2010, with the shift towards faster integration of the newcomers into the local society (Sveriges Riksdag, 2009). In Sweden, support to the incoming refugees is discussed alongside general peace and development issues. In 2016, the costs of the newcomers’ reception were partially covered by deductions from the Swedish development cooperation funds, which was at the same time followed by the increased focus on the conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Middle East (Sida, 2016).

Being one of the fundamental rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to information is an important issue in the discussion on the rights of refugees. Importantly, the right to information does not mean the mere presence of the data in the information system or hypothetical possibility to access some random data. To be of use, information has to be available, comprehensible and relevant to the needs of the user. It has been repeatedly stated in the numerous information science theories that receiving such information is a tool through which individuals organize their lives, make sense of the situations and events they encounter, and achieve “the mastery of life” (Belkin, 1980; Dervin, 2003; Savolainen, 2008).

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1 Henceforward, the term “newcomers” stands for the asylum seekers and those forced migrants who received their Swedish residence permit.
Currently, Swedish integration policy includes some elements focused at reaching the information needs of newcomers: for example, within the establishment programme offered by the Swedish Public Employment Service, individuals are surveyed to identify their needs for “social and employment information”, with the idea of meeting them during the later stages of the programme (Sveriges Riksdag, 2009). Still, the setting and the actual content of the introduction activities available in each locality is, by the Swedish law, the municipalities’ prerogative. Therefore, there exists a need to look into the needs and strategies at the local level, as well as into the actual integration practice that is conducted by the state agencies and involved non-governmental organizations in each municipality.

Kronoberg County was chosen as a case for a local community in Sweden that faces significant challenges to make the reception and integration process work. By January 2017, Kronoberg is hosting one asylum seeker (person registered in the Swedish Migration Board’s reception system) per 54 locals (Migrationsverket, 2017b). As well as in the other Southern counties of Sweden, the concentration of asylum seekers is substantially higher than the country’s average (one per 81.5 locals) or bigger metropolitan areas (Stockholm – 134.5, or Skåne – 100 locals per one asylum seeker) (Ibid). Therefore, Kronoberg seems to be a suitable location to study the situation of the newcomers, their information practices and communication strategies employed by the local actors in the field of integration.

This research project focuses specifically on the information behavior of the Afghan newcomers, both asylum seekers and those who already received their residence permit, but still struggles to be integrated into the Swedish society. In their latest reports, both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International emphasize the political instability, financial hardship, intensification of the Taliban attacks, as well as human rights violations by the government forces, and subsequent internal displacement as some of the major issues that the population of Afghanistan has to face (Amnesty International, 2017, p. 58), (Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 65). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR), due to this dire situation, approximately 2.6 million people from Afghanistan had to flee their country, with refugees asking for asylum in 70 countries all over the world (UNHCR, Geneva, p. 56). Afghanistan was the country of origin for 16% of all the refugees coming to the European OECD countries (OECD, 2016, p. 9). Those fleeing from Afghanistan comprise one of the biggest groups of asylum seekers in Sweden. In 2015, Afghans filed 41.564 asylum applications to the Swedish Migration Board, while in 2016 they filed 2.969
such applications, in both cases taking the second position in the rating of the countries of origin of asylum seekers in Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2016b; 2017a).

Another argument in favor of focusing on this group is based on the experience that the author of this study received volunteering for one of the integration projects in Kronoberg. Work with mostly Afghan participants allowed to establish contacts within this specific group, gain a better understanding of the situation, and create a trustful setting for the interviews.

1.2. **Research Objectives and Questions**

This project looks into the issue of information practices taking newcomers in the Kronoberg County in Southern Sweden as an example. Therefore, the research objective is to contribute to a better understanding of the information practices of the newcomers in the Kronoberg County, as well as to identify how the local service providers take into account these practices in order to ensure the target group’s right to information. The ideal scenario here is for this research paper to serve as a reference for policy-makers and other active actors in the field on the local level for designing their communication efforts.

To reach these objectives, the following research questions had to be answered:

- What are the information practices used by the newcomers in Kronoberg?
- What type of communication strategies are used in the integration process to ensure the right of the newcomers to relevant and accessible information in Kronoberg?
- Is there congruence or contradiction between the information practices used by the newcomers and communication strategies used in the integration process in Kronoberg?

1.3. **Research Relevance**

More than 190,000 refugees have applied for asylum in Sweden in 2015 and 2016, creating unprecedented pressure on the reception system (Migrationsverket, 2016b; 2017a). Most of the asylum seekers – 122,708 people as of January 1, 2017 – stayed in Sweden, living in asylum homes or other types of accommodation provided or financed by the state (Migrationsverket, 2017b). Over the last few years, many of the newcomers in Sweden found themselves in the “legal limbo”, waiting continuously for the decision of the Migration agency regarding their refugee status (Radio Sweden, 2015). Therefore, integration of the newcomers as well as ensuring their rights continues to be a highly relevant issue for the policymakers on different levels, from local to regional and national.
There is also a reason for the focus on the country of origin of this research paper to maintain relevance in the nearest future. Both public and academic discussion point out to the fact that actions aimed at eliminating terrorist activity in Afghanistan are mostly ineffective, with little hope for stabilization (Roberts, 2016, p. 97). In its report to the Security Council, Secretary-General of the United Nations noted that there is “no discernible progress” in the peace process involving the Government of Afghanistan and Taliban (United Nations, 2017). Accordingly, there are high chances for Afghan refugees to continue being one of the biggest groups in Europe. Therefore, there is an opportunity for contribution in regard to the research on access of refugees to information in host countries and in situations of prolonged stay.

On the policy level, interest to the topic of information practices of refugees is mostly shaped by research around the refugee camps and usage of information and communications technology (ICT) by refugees (Vernon, et al., 2016). From the academic perspective, the research on the rights of refugees to relevant and accessible information, as well as on policies aimed to ensure this right, is still limited. As it will be shown in the next chapter, most of the research on information behavior and needs of the displaced populations looks into migrants’ communities generally, with little concern for the specific situation of those fleeing from violent conflicts and persecution.

On a more general level, the topic of the information practices of refugees can be seen a case and evidence in the larger debate – one on the human information behavior. One of the sides in this discussion stands on the point that communication act starts with an individual realizing that his knowledge is insufficient to perform a task or generally to make sense of his current situation. Active information seeking motivated by this realization, is in the center of attention of a few prominent researchers – for example, in Wilson’s (1981) original model of human behavior, Dervin’s (2003) sense-making theory, or Belkin’s (1980) anomalous State of knowledge.

On another side, there is a set of studies that emphasize that information can be received through different practices, even if they are not active, purposeful, and directed (Erdelez, 1999; McKenzie, 2003). On this side of the debate, Savolainen in his everyday information practices theory also challenges the idea of information as only bits of data needed to solve specific tasks. Alongside this task-related information, he incorporates the ideas of “orienting” information, which gives one general direction on how to achieve “mastery of life” (Savolainen, 1995).
This approach seems to fit perfectly for research on information behavior of displaced groups: some seminal papers coming from Canada already use the combination of theoretical and analytical frameworks suggested by Savolainen and McKenzie (Caidi & Allard, 2005). Therefore, an interest can be seen for testing it in other settings to develop its analytical potential. A short summary of the chosen theory and arguments in favor of it are presented below. For a more detailed account of the discussion see the separate “Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks” chapter further in this paper.

1.4. Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

This study employs Savolainen’s concept of everyday information practices as the theoretical basis. Information practices here are “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources” (Savolainen, 2008, p. 2). Importantly, Savolainen’s theory differs greatly from the traditional take on information behavior. Savolainen’s theory allows to account for a wide range of behaviors, needs, and situational settings of human communication, which seems especially important in the case of refugees and asylum seekers. With the need to re-set their lives at the new place they require information in various spheres but might restrain from active information-seeking, preferring less directed practices. These might include active scanning, non-direct monitoring (e.g. overhearing), getting information through a proxy, someone who decided to give information without being asked to (McKenzie, 2003). From the practical perceptive, communication strategy based on the traditional accounting for the directed practices might not take into account the whole variety of experiences and, therefore, be less effective.

Savolainen’s theory is operationalized in the context of the information behavior of the refugees and asylum seekers through a combination of three analytical models. Following the example of Caidi and Allard (2005), McKenzie’s two-dimensional model of everyday information practices (McKenzie, 2003) is combined here with Mwarigha’s stages of settlement model (Mwarigha, 2002). Additionally, Berlo’s (1960) SMCR model of communication is introduced here to guide the questioning and analysis of the collected material.

1.5. Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative design was chosen to collect and analyze the experiences and perceptions of the newcomers, as well as of the policy-makers and practitioners in the field. With constructivist approach in mind, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face retrospective
interviews were conducted. The interviews were envisaged to be open-ended, therefore a loose thematic guide served as a frame for holding them.

Purposeful sampling approach was used here, with two groups of respondents. The first one comprised of the newcomers from Afghanistan living in Kronoberg. Here, sampling was aimed at collecting heterogeneous information-rich accounts that represent various perspectives within the ethnic group. Major characteristics were the time of arrival, legal status, type of accommodation, gender, educational level, and language skills.

The second group comprised of actors influencing policy and practice of newcomers’ reception and integration in Kronoberg. Local policy-makers, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and service providers were interviewed to explore how they perceive the information behavior of refugees, with the goal to detect how these perceptions might influence the actual policies and practice. In addition to the material collected during the interviews, digital and print communication materials were analyzed.

To interpret the received data, thematic analysis was applied with a 5-level process of interpretation: from transcribing the data to detecting the major themes and connections between them (Robson, 2011, p. 474). The analysis of accounts was conducted through a thematic map to detect connections and causations, as well congruence and contradictions in two groups of respondents.

1.6. Structure
This research paper takes the following structure. The first chapter describes the formulation of the research problem, states objectives and questions of this study, and explains its relevance. It also provides a short overview of the theoretical and analytical frameworks, as well as the research methods. The second chapter goes into detail describing the theoretical setting of the project, with the overview of the current academic debate on information behavior and application of this framework to the needs of migrants, including asylum seekers. The choice of the theory is also explained in this part. Chapter three describes the methodology used for this study, providing information on sampling, data collection and analysis, limitations of the chosen design, and some of the ethical considerations. In chapter four, findings of the research are presented based on the thematic analysis of the interview material. The findings are organized in accordance with Mwarigha’s “stages of settlement” (2002). In chapter five, analysis of the findings is provided with
respect to the research questions of the study. Finally, in the Conclusions, recommendations for further research are provided based on the findings of this paper.
2. Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

In this chapter, a short overview of the discussion around the human information behavior is presented in a chronological manner which demonstrates the advancements that led to the development of the chosen theoretical approach. In addition, this chapter looks into the specific topics and approaches used by researchers from different countries to study information seeking and use by various displaced populations around the globe. Based on these discussions and experiences, arguments that prove the applicability of the Savolainen’s everyday information practices theory to the chosen research setting are also presented here.

2.1. Discussion around Information Behavior, Needs, and Practices

The topic of the information practices is a part of a bigger academic debate on how individuals get to know the world. In this discussion, two major sides can be identified. One school (that can be labeled as “traditional”) sees information retrieval as a result of the purposeful, active information seeking that starts when one realizes the lack of knowledge to perform a task. The second school (can be labeled as “holistic”) argues that people get the information about the world in different ways, not only through purposeful activities. Sometimes, knowledge is received through practices such as monitoring, being informed by a proxy, or even in a situation of an accidental encounter. Some of the major ideas and critical views of both sides of the debate are presented below.

The first school of information behavior studies is a more developed one since research based on this approach started earlier. It is perceived that the first papers on information were presented in 1948 when the Royal Society Scientific Conference took place with some of the very first studies of the information search and information users (Paisley, 1966, p. 12), (Wilson, 2000b). Since pioneers in the field looked into information retrieval process in the libraries, it is not surprising that the first research projects approached information-related behavior as limited to observable, manifested actions like questions or requests to the formal information system. It is also this library- and science-focused setting that limited the first research projects to exploring mostly work-related information search and use (Wilson, 2000a).

One of the first milestones in the work of this school is an article by Taylor that focuses on the process of questioning and information-seeking in libraries (Taylor, 1968). Here, Taylor’s main contribution was the introduction of the “model of information need” (Cole, 2012, p. 19). Taylor looks into the process of question formation, defining four major stages, from the unexpressed need
to the question being asked in the context of the information system (Taylor, 1968, p. 182). Importantly for the debate, Taylor presents the notion of the “visceral” need (Ibid) just as the first step of the questioning process, which is inevitably followed by the realization of the need and action. This seems to be a doubtful assumption since even if the need is realized, an individual might opt not to pursue active information seeking (i.e. due to shyness or fear). Moreover, the realized need might just play a role in another type of information encounter than information seeking, i.e. in being informed by someone accidentally.

In her continuous research that started in 1972, Dervin focuses on “sense-making” – a process where individuals attempt to make use of their experiences (Dervin, 2003). For Dervin, sense-making happens within a triangular: between a situation and possible uses of the experience that this situation can provide, there are the actor’s gaps in understanding. The gap can be bridged when an individual strategy is used to answer arising questions and form ideas (Ibid, p. 277). Although highly abstract and therefore flexible and open to various uses and interpretations, this methodological approach still has a distinct feature – it focuses on conscious, realized informational deficiency, which was rather characteristic of the time when the model was created.

Since the researchers at that time looked into observable information-related actions, they automatically focused on the conscious motivations to perform these activities, with a special interest in the reasons and incentives for a person to engage in the information-seeking behavior. One of the most cited articles in human information behavior comes from this tradition – T. D. Wilson started his enquiries with looking into the observable information behavior and created a model of information seeking (Wilson, 1981). Here, he looks into the various motivations that make individuals look for information, although, in line with the previous tradition of emphasizing professional communication, Wilson states that the actor’s “work-role” is the most important of all the spheres where information seeking might occur (Ibid, p.9). As it will be shown later, not only this accent shifted in the later studies, but the whole idea of dividing individual’s motivations for informational behavior into job-related and non-job-related was put under question.

During this time, numerous other researchers focused on studying directed, purposeful information behavior, mostly information seeking, taking Wilson’s model as a starting point. Similarly to Wilson, Belkin looks into different perspectives in which motivations for information seeking. In his “anomalous state of knowledge” model, Belkin (1978) suggests that recipients initiate communication as a result of recognizing the anomalies in their knowledge.
The school that opposes the idea of focusing on realized deficiency in knowledge and directed actions builds on a few recent works that bring to attention some of the deficiencies of the traditional theories.

Ellis presented his findings as a “model for information-seeking behavior”, where the terminology itself demonstrates the same focus as the traditional theories. Still, unlike its predecessors in the field of information science, this framework recognized some of the patterns that were later proven to be separate processes – namely, less directed types of informational behavior (Ellis, 1993). Among other activities, Ellis mentions monitoring (as “maintaining awareness of developments in a field”) and browsing (as “semi-directed searching in the area of interest”) (Ibid, p. 482).

Developing the idea of browsing, Chang (2005) explains that it concerns various levels of scanning activity through different sources, with different types of goals – more than just defined or non-defined (an approach that traditionally brings about the dichotomy of purposeful or non-purposeful information behavior). According to Chang, browsing can come in five different types: looking for a specific item, looking for something with a common characteristic, keeping up-to-date (which looks close to Ellis’s monitoring), learning or finding out, goal-free browsing (Ibid, p. 71). Empirical data provided by Chang proves that with such a wide range of strategies and motivations, especially in the digital age, limiting the research on information behavior to the purposeful information seeking, as it was done in the traditional theories, does not seem reasonable.

Sandra Erdelez goes even further from the standard purposeful and active information seeking. She argues that by using the “information-seeking behavior” as a universal term for information retrieval, researchers from the traditional school of information science limit the discussion to only active and problem-oriented behavior, which is far from exhaustive representation (Erdelez, 1999). Erdelez emphasizes that in real life, information is often discovered accidentally, without purposeful directed action being involved. Moreover, the concept of accidental information encountering that Erdelez promotes by her work accounts for the complexity of the tasks that an actor might have, as well for his past and future needs – as a contrast to the traditional models that are mostly limited to one task or need (Ibid, p. 26).

At the same time as interest to the non-purposeful information behavior was developing, scientists also started to pay more attention to the non-work information needs and behavior (contrary to the focus on work-related issues in the traditional theories). This also brings about the interest to the social environment and its effect on information behavior. Chatman argues that the influence of the
person’s “small world”, its social norms, and resulting worldview is crucial in determining how and where an individual looks for information (Chatman, 1999). According to the “life in a round” theory, one will normally avoid trespassing the boundaries set by their small world to seek for information (Ibid, p.214).

Savolainen looks into the social environment as at the field where the actor pursues his way of life. In line with the Dervin’s theory of sense-making, Savolainen treats information behavior as one of the tools for the individual to achieve the “mastery of life”, the ability to sustain the preferred order of things (Savolainen, 1995). The strength of this framework lies in the fact that information acquisition here is perceived holistically, accounting for various strategies and life-situation settings (see more on Savolainen’s theory and its development in “The Choice of Theory”).

Despite the continuing success of his first model, by the second half of the 1990s, Wilson recognized that it requires an update and suggested a revised version, which reflected the trend for a wider representation of various patterns in information behavior (Wilson, 1999). Here, Wilson recognizes that alongside active search, information-seeking behavior might include such strategies as passive attention and passive search (Ibid, p. 257). Moreover, he pays more attention to the moment where an individual decides to engage in the information-seeking behavior or avoid it, recognizing the issues of stress and other contextual factors.

Another example of an integrative model is one suggested by Spink et al. – the multitasking and co-ordinating framework for human information behavior (HIB). The authors suggest that different approaches to HIB previously developed by major researchers can be integrated as representations of different sub-processes in the wider process of information behavior (Spink, et al., 2006). Here, for example, information seeking and behavior related to problem-solving is a basic stage of understanding of motivation, while the level of sense-making/ELIS (everyday life information seeking) presents a higher, more general level of goals, like abovementioned Savolainen’s “mastery of life”.

To sum up, academic research on human information behavior started with the theories that recognized only purposeful information-related acts, but recently the debate led to a more holistic approach to information encounters. Still, the research paradigm which includes different, directed and less-directed information practices has only started developing, with a need to test this type of models in different environments and ontological settings.
2.2. Discussion on Information Seeking and Use among the Migrants

Research on information behavior of different groups of migrants (both voluntary and forced) has been developing most actively in a few regions that experience large influxes of newcomers: North America, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. One of the most actively developing fields of information behavior of migrants is the use of ICT. Some of the researchers in this area focus on the use of Internet as the way to maintain connections and receive information about the migrants’ home countries (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Komito & Bates, 2011).

Others focus on the issue of digital divide – the idea that due to the less developed skills in regard to the use of ICT and limitations in physical access to such technology, migrants might experience difficulties with social inclusion and integration, effective communication and expressing their identity (Alam & Imran, 2015; Diaz Andrade & Doolin, 2016). In terms of refugees’ information practices, the use of ICT also seems to be the most popular topic. In 2013, Oxford’s Journal of Refugees Studies dedicated a whole special issue to the issues of forced migration and ICT. Two of the included articles are of most relevance to the topic. Harney researches the use of mobile phones for problem-solving among refugees in Naples (Harney, 2013). Gifford and Wilding (2013) build their inquiry on the case of young refugees in Melbourne to explore how ICT can help one to get integrated into the new society while being connected to their family and home country.

The Syrian conflict and other situations of forced displacement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have also influenced the progress of academic research in the field. One of the examples is a study conducted by Wall et al. (2015) conducted on information precarity and use of mobile phones by the Syrian refugees in the temporary settlements in Jordan. In addition, ICT, namely mobile connectivity, is one of the priorities in research and policy of one of the most important international organizations that deals with refugees – UNHCR (Vernon, et al., 2016), which might be a sign of more academic interest in the future.

Another topic that is being actively discussed in academia in regard to addressing the information needs of migrants, is the role of libraries. For example, Caidi and Allard (2005) look into the role of libraries in the social inclusion of newcomers to Canada; Sirikul and Dorner (2016) explore the barriers that keep Thai immigrants to New Zealand from using library services; Khoir et al. (2017) study the contribution that the use of the public library services makes to the developing of the social capital of Asian immigrants to Australia.
In relation to the modern theoretical approaches of the information science, the recent studies in migrant’s information behavior tend to employ widely the concepts of information practices, ELIS, and related ideas. For example, Nadia Caidi and Danielle Allard (2005) apply these theories to examine social inclusion of migrants in Canada. Influenced by this paper, Quirke (2011) uses the same framework to look into the experiences related to information acquisition by young Afghani immigrants in Toronto. Lloyd et al. (2013, p. 126) use Savolainen’s and McKenzie’s views on information practice as a starting point to build their idea of information literacy practice based on a qualitative study of refugees in Australia. Lingel (2015) references to the same notions to explore the information seeking of urban migrants in New York. Khoir et al. (2015) used a related everyday information behavior framework to study Asian immigrants in Southern Australia.

It is important to recognize that most of the studies on migrants’ information behavior are limited in their scope, and their findings cannot be generalized due to the narrow thematic focus and samples (Caidi & Allard, 2010). Therefore, there exists a need to continuously conduct additional research projects in order to study emerging and developing situations of migration in different countries.

Moreover, in the case of the information practices of the specific group of migrants – refugees – most of the studies within the research I have done on the topic focus on the situation of refugees that live in camps, with less attention to those who are involved in the resettlement process, including those fleeing to Europe. There is also a recent tendency to pay more attention to the private use of ICT and new media, with less interest in traditional forms of communication (except for the library-centered research) and public policy-related issues.

Finally, there is a trend to switch from the studies based on older information behavior theories (e.g. limited to looking into information needs) to more holistic ones, especially those based on the ideas that derive from Savolainen’s everyday information seeking and McKenzie’s information practices. Still, there is a need to test this approach in different settings and develop a flexible analytical and methodological apparatus for its further use in academic and policy-related research.

### 2.3. Choice of the Theory

For the purpose of this research project, I decided to apply Savolainen’s everyday information practices theory. There are three main arguments for choosing this theory over others; yet to explain them, a short description of the theory has to be given first.
The first important premise of this theoretical framework is the concept of everyday life information seeking (ELIS). Developed in 1995, this theory was a part of the trend in the information and communication science that made researchers look outside the limited context of library-, science-, and generally work-related information behavior (Savolainen, 1995, p. 260). Building on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, Savolainen introduces the ideas of the “way of life” and “mastery of life” to describe the choices that individuals make in their everyday life to establish the general meaningful order of things (Savolainen, 1995).

As opposed to the theories that present information-seeking behavior as a way to fulfill a specific cognitive need for knowledge, ELIS suggests that people look for and use information to “orient themselves in daily life or to solve problems not directly connected with the performance of occupational tasks” (Savolainen, 1995, p. 266). Therefore, it is not a separate cognitive need that pushes people for information-related behavior, but the urge to learn something in order to fulfill other needs. Importantly, although emphasizing the non-professional setting, Savolainen also gives a remark to the wrongful dichotomy of non-work and work-related issues. In his framework, these two spheres overlap as people look for the ways to organize their lives in a holistic way, with regards to the values and attitudes that are shaped within a certain way of life, as well as to the subject’s culture and social class.

Still, the concept of everyday life information seeking limits the information behavior of an individual to the purposeful actions, leaving accidental encounters out of the picture. When criticizing this approach, McKenzie (2003), although being generally supportive of the idea, argues that the analysis has to be widened to acknowledge that information behavior has to include non-active information-seeking. McKenzie suggests that the notion of information practice has to be employed here since it allows to account for a wider picture.

Although looking at the issue from another perspective (social phenomenology, as opposed to McKenzie’s constructionism), Savolainen comes to a similar conclusion a few years later, arguing that the umbrella term of information behavior does not account for the full range of activities and patterns of human communication (Savolainen, 2007). Using these findings and the earlier ELIS theory as a basis, Savolainen (2008) developed the concept of the everyday information practices.

Here, he gives a definition to the notion of information practices: “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources such
as television, newspapers, and the Internet” (Savolainen, 2008, p. 2). Importantly, Savolainen emphasizes that the framework of information behavior which is guided only by the individual internal needs does not accommodate the whole range of possible motivations. Information practice, on the other hand, envisages that the processes of seeking and using information are influenced by the social and other external contexts, they obtain meaning as they are used to solve everyday tasks, and are constructed dialogically.

As for the arguments for using the everyday information practices theory in the chosen research setting, three of them played the most important role in the choice of the theory. First of all, this theory steps out of the traditional library-, science-, or organization-based setting of information research. It accounts for the wide range of needs and behaviors that people demonstrate in their daily lives. The notions of the “way of life” and “mastery of life” are also important, helping to define the context in which information practices are performed by refugees and asylum seekers.

Secondly, representing the integrative approach to the information behavior, Savolainen’s theory allows to account for the full range of information-related activities and factors that might influence them. When it comes to the refugees in the new and challenging circumstances, it seems rational to expect that this target group might not fully realize some of their information needs. They also might be more likely to avoid active information-seeking behavior or to encounter barriers to act (e.g. language). Therefore, models that only focus on conscious needs and purposeful actions (like those suggested by Dervin, Belkin, and others) do not seem operational in this case.

Thirdly, non-active information seeking is harder to observe and therefore was studied less actively. Still, it is argued in this study, that, to be meaningful and operational for the policy-makers and practitioners, research on the information behavior of newcomers has to be more holistic than the traditional models of information behavior suggest. While there is no doubt that conscious information needs of the target group have to be explored, it is also important to look into the situations where accidental encounters with information might happen. Besides just giving a deeper account of the subject, this approach might also be instrumental in terms of making communication policies and practice more effective.
2.4. Analytical Framework

To operationalize the everyday information practice theory in the context of the information behavior of the newcomers, I decided to combine three analytical models used in information science and migration studies. The combination of the first two models was suggested by Caidi and Allard (2005) and it seems to suggest a proper structuring setting to collect information. It was decided, however, to add another model to the analytical framework to make it more practice-oriented. It was important that in addition to the information practices of the newcomers, the model accounted and helped to evaluate the communication strategies of different agencies. Therefore, a third model (Berlo, 1960) was added to the framework. The model describes not only the process of information retrieval but also its elements and their characteristics.

The core model to be employed is McKenzie’s (2003) two-dimensional model of information practices based on ELIS, which accounts for the four major modes. Here, active information seeking concerns looking for a specific piece of information through a previously identified source. It is often related to asking questions, referencing back to the inquiry made by Taylor (1968) in the first stages of the information science development. Still, it is only a part of a wider range of information practices:

![Figure 1: McKenzie’s two-dimensional model of information practices based on ELIS](image)

McKenzie divides each of the modes into two phases – connecting and interacting. For the purpose of this research project, this distinction is less important. Due to the constructionist approach of the
study, most accounts represent the complete action with both phases combined. Moreover, since a few models are employed here at the same time, it seemed reasonable to merge these two stages for the sake of simplification, which is especially important for the interviewing process. Therefore, the final analytical model of this study includes the four modes of information practices, but not the phases suggested by McKenzie.

The second model used for this study is the model of the new immigrants’ information needs used by Nadia Caidi and Danielle Allard (2005). This model is based on the three stages of settlement defined by Shadrack Mwarigha (2002): immediate, intermediate, and long-terms needs. Accordingly, the information needs and behaviors on each of these stages focus around:

- Immediate stage: information about essentials, like food, shelter, getting around, means to address the language barrier.
- Intermediate stage: information about access to different services, housing, employment, healthcare.
- Long-term stage: various individual needs connected to inclusion and integration (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Mwarigha, 2002).

The idea of the three stages of the immigrants’ needs seems more operational in the current research setting than ones that are based on the subject’s “journey” to the host country. Since the situation is analyzed on the local level, there is no use into looking, for example, into the pre-departure stage, since local actors have no influence on the information that refugees receive before they enter the country.

Thirdly, it is assumed here that the analytical categories used for this study should reflect every element of the communication process, with the interview questions addressing their specific features (e.g. the language issues, suggesting a question – “Is the information you need always available in the language you understand?”). The approach set by the classic Berlo’s SMCR (Source-Message-Channel-Recipient) model of communication seems to be the most operational for this purpose, since it allows the researcher to take into account the whole range of different factors that could influence the behavior of the subject in the process of communication, including some of the important features that are not reflected in other models (Berlo, 1960, p. 72). For example, the abovementioned issue of the language barrier is reflected here in the “Coding” category (which can also include other issues, like file formats or font size).
With these remarks taken into account, the final analytical model of this study combines three models in the following way. On the horizontal axis, Mwarigha’s stages of settlement define different needs of immigrants at different stages of their settlement in the new place. On the vertical axis, McKenzie’s modes of information practice represent different ways in which individuals might look for or encounter information. Therefore, the intersection of these axes represents modes that newcomers might use during different stages of integration in the new society. Finally, around these intersections, the actual interview topics are nested, reflecting the analytical categories borrowed from the Berlo’s SMCR model.

**Table 1: Combined Analytical Model for Information Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of settlement</th>
<th>Immediate</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Long-term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active seeking</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: What sources were employed at this stage? What were their characteristics in terms of Berlo’s categories? Was the contact with them successful?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message: What information were respondents looking for at each stage? What messages were they actually receiving? What were their characteristics in terms of Berlo’s categories?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel: What channels were used at this stage?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiver: What were the characteristics of the receivers in terms of Berlo’s categories? Were they able to receive messages and make sense of them?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active scanning
- **Source:** What sources were scanned at this stage? What were their characteristics in terms of Berlo’s categories? Which of them actually worked as informants?
- **Messages:** What information was being sought for at each stage? What information was actually received?
- **Channels:** What channels were being scanned?
- **Receiver:** What was the perception of the receiver and his capabilities to make sense of the information?

Non-direct monitoring
- **Source:** What sources served as accidental informants during non-direct monitoring? What were their characteristics in terms of Berlo’s categories?
- **Messages:** What information was received at each stage?
- **Channels:** What channels were used during this interaction?
- **Receiver:** What was the perception of the receiver and his capabilities to make sense of the information?

By proxy
- **Source:** What sources approached the receiver and served as informants? What were their characteristics in terms of Berlo’s categories?
- **Messages:** What information was received at each stage?
- **Channels:** What channels were used during this interaction?
- **Receiver:** What was the perception of the receiver and his capabilities to make sense of the information?

This final combined model, although accounting for a wide picture of information practices and actors, has a flaw: it requires a lot of effort from the respondents to recall the information encounters they were involved in. However, as it was stated before, in line with the constructivist approach, in this study, accounts are deemed meaningful as long as they are memorable for the subjects. Therefore, the findings and analysis are presented later in this paper according to the framework, but to the extent to which it was possible to gather recollections from the respondents and in the narrative form.
3. Methodological framework

3.1. Research Design, Methods, and Data Collection

This research is a qualitative deductive study, with constructivism serving as a guiding ontological position. By using in-depth face-to-face retrospective interviews, it was envisaged to obtain detailed records of personal experiences of the newcomers in terms of everyday information practices. Another point of interest was the images of these experiences that service providers have and use to shape their public communication strategies. It is assumed here that different stakeholders in the immigration and integration process have different views on the priorities in such communication, as well as experience information encounters differently. Following Patton’s approach to the social constructivist analysis of public policies, this study explores how differences in perception might influence the actual integration practice and, specifically, communication strategies employed by the actors in the field (Patton, 2015).

The interviews were designed as semi-structured to allow the respondents to lead the conversation towards the discussion of events and feelings meaningful for them. To achieve a more open-ended orientation of the interview, it was decided to prepare the thematic interview guides based on the analytical model, as opposed to the approach where a set of pre-defined questions are used. At the same time, the questions and prompts used during the interviews were developed within the analytical framework presented above. The questions were also standardized to avoid the different framing which might lead to the distortion of findings.

The first interview guide, aimed at newcomers, employs a combination of McKenzie’s, Caidi & Allard’s, and Berlo’s models to explore the experiences of information seeking or encountering that the respondents can recall and define as important, as well as to solicit their perceptions of these experiences. The same analytical models are used for the second group of interviews – interviews with the experts, the service providers. In this case, the questions reflect the same logical categories but are aimed at detecting the major perceptions of the information practices and needs of the newcomers that guide policymaking and practice in this field.
3.2. Sources Used
Primary units of analysis of this research comprise of interview transcripts of two types: interviews with newcomers and interviews with the key informants, experts in the field, practitioners who work with the target group at the state agencies and non-governmental organizations. In most cases, interviews were conducted individually, except for one group interview: women in the “Newcomers” group were reluctant to talk to a stranger in such a setting, but found it appropriate to talk in a group. Secondary sources for this research were the statistical data and communication materials (print and digital) that are used by the local actors to implement their communication strategies.

3.3. Sampling

Group 1: Newcomers
A combination of purposeful sampling strategies was used to select the information-rich accounts for this research project. The maximum variation strategy served as a guide for identifying the perspective of the new arrivals that have already received their residence permit (Patton, 2015, p. 182). To account for the different situations, 8 Afghan newcomers living in Kronoberg were interviewed. Variations concerned such characteristics as:
- educational level (from no education to Bachelor’s level with work experience);
- languages spoken (from almost no or limited ability to speak Swedish to proficiency; additionally – the ability to speak English and/or Swedish);
- age (from 19 to 60);
- gender;
- family situation and role in the family (from single men to the oldest women in a big family);
- time of coming to Sweden (three periods with regards to the different law arrangements and workload in the reception system at the time of arrival);
- legal status (asylum seeker, received a residence permit, appealing the negative decision);
- type of residence (asylum home, rented apartment, accommodation through relatives);
- place of residence (4 cities in 3 municipalities of Kronoberg: Växjö, Alvesta, Ljungby).
Some of the details on how these characteristics might change the perceptions are provided below.

It was assumed that newcomers might have experienced different treatments depending on the period when they arrived in the country since Swedish immigration and integration situation has been changing profoundly during the last years.
To account for these possible differences, three types of cases were included in the sample:

- those who arrived before 2015, when the influx of the refugees was relatively moderate and reception system didn’t experience significant difficulties – (3 respondents);
- those who arrived in 2015 – first half of 2016, when services started to be overloaded, and public discussion started to head towards the restrictive policies (4 respondents);
- those who arrived after July 20, 2016, when new restrictive laws entered into power, which might have influenced both the situations of the asylum seekers and perceptions of the practitioners (Migrationsverket, 2016a) (1 respondent).

It was decided to limit the sample to the grown-up respondents, since life situations, entitlement to services, and information needs of the minors differ greatly and therefore would require a different research setting. Moreover, research on this group is limited in terms of the work-related and non-work contexts of communication that are an important element of the chosen theory.

Inside these groups, two major legal statuses are represented: people waiting for the decision on their asylum application and those who have already received their residence permits. It is assumed that life situations, experiences, and therefore perceptions inside these two groups may differ greatly, therefore this factor should be taken into account. Additionally, in one case a person in the process of appellation was interviewed. It was also assumed that communication patterns of the subjects might differ depending on their gender, therefore, the sample was divided equally into two groups based on this characteristic.

**Group 2: Key Informants**
The second group of respondents comprises of a selection of practitioners in the field of integration. Maximum variation sampling was also employed here, to ensure the views from service providers from different levels and modes of participation are taken into account. The 8 respondents of this group represent the following bodies:

- National Level: Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsformedlingen), an agency that coordinates its work with the local municipalities and hires private companies to provide the Establishment plan’s services (i.e. courses of Swedish, job search guidance) for the newcomers that have a residence permit to stay in Sweden.
- Regional level: Kronoberg County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen Kronoberg) – one of the 21 regional administrative bodies in Sweden; responsible for the general coordination
of the integration process. Since 2017, in charge of the funds’ provision to support the integration activities for the asylum seekers who are waiting for the decision on their residence permit.

- Local level: Alvesta Municipality (Kommun), a government entity responsible for the provision of services for those who received the residence permit; also provides childcare and schooling to the children of the newcomers and unaccompanied minors. As a unique case – partially extended its scope of work by launching an information service for the newcomers.

- Local level: Information Center in Alvesta. Provides consultation, translation services, and guidance to all the newcomers, regardless of the legal status.

- Local level: Växjö City Library, service providers within the Växjö municipality. Organizes language cafes in the main library in Växjö, as well as few smaller libraries around the municipality. A “New in Sweden” bookshelf provides literature in different languages on Swedish life and traditions, as well as course books and study materials for learning Swedish. Services available to all people leaving in the area.

- Local level: Civic Office (Medborgar Kontoret) within Växjö municipality. Open to all people living in the area, but most of the services are targeted at residence permit holders.

- Non-governmental organizations: Red Cross Vaxjo, a branch of the international humanitarian movement; provides language courses, organizes language cafes and mentoring programme for all newcomers regardless of the legal status.

- Non-governmental organizations: Sensus, an educational center in Växjö that uses government-provided grants to provide free-of-charge language courses, courses aimed at learning about the Swedish society, as well as organizes other integration activities for all the newcomers regardless of the legal status (although in case of the language courses primarily serves as an alternative educational opportunity for the asylum seekers that are not entitled to attend “Swedish for Immigrants” schools).

The national-level agencies are presented here by the Public Employment Service, but the selection of respondents does not include the Swedish Migration Board. This might be seen as a weakness of the sample, especially in terms of the immediate stage of integration. However, it was identified during the other interviews that the information provided by this agency is very limited and concerns only the asylum process and personal cases of the newcomers. Both topics are extremely sensitive,
therefore it is doubtful that a meaningful account of experience could be retrieved through this source.

3.4. Validity and Reliability
On the level of a sample group, validity and reliability of the data were ensured through the maximum variation strategy: that the more respondents with varying characteristics point out to the same facts, the more trustworthy the findings are. On a more general level, respondent validation technique was used additionally to confirm the correct interpretation of the data. Having two different groups of respondents based on their roles also added to the validity since the accounts represented different roles in the integration process. Inside the service providers’ group validation was ensured by including representatives of both governmental and non-governmental groups.

3.5. Interpretation of the Data
To interpret the data collected during the interviews, this study used thematic analysis, or what Seale (2004, p. 314) calls “qualitative thematic analysis”, while Robson (2011, p. 474) calls it “thematic coding analysis”. Following Robson’s template (Ibid) build on the earlier work of Ritchie and Spencer (2002), the analysis was conducted in five stages.

On the first one, all the interviews were transcribed and read several times to obtain a general understanding of the data. On the second stage, first-level coding was conducted, where labels were attached to a certain group of words united by similar meanings. Here, “a theory-driven code” (Boyatzis, 1998) was used, where codes were roughly predefined by the researchers (and reflected in the interview questions and prompts), to be later extracted from the data deductively. On the third stage, major themes were defined, whereas on the fours they were grouped and organized. To define and organize the topics, such indicators as repetition, indigenous categories, and transitions were mainly employed (Ryan & H. Russell, 2003). On the fourth stage, a mapping technique was used as a template to reflect the findings of the interviews analysis and to make the further comparison and identification of connections feasible. On the last, fifth stage, topics were integrated and interpreted, mainly through defining causations and comparing findings in two major groups of respondents (newcomers and experts) and between the categories suggested by the Berlo’s model of communication (Source, Message, Channel, Recipient).
As Robson (2011, p. 477) mentions in the discussion of disadvantages of thematic analysis, it is criticized for being often used as a purely descriptive method. However, within the research setting of this study, the interpretative potential of thematic analysis is put into use through comparative analysis. As it was mentioned earlier, here, comparison between perceptions of two groups of respondents, as well as between findings within different analytical categories helps to identify differences in the perceptions and possible practical implications of such differences.

Communication and statistical data provided by the experts representing different agencies was used to verify their statements, i.e. – on the availability of the different language versions of the brochures and posters.

3.6. Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this project stem from the chosen logic of the research. Taking into account its qualitative methodology and limited scope, if the need arises to generalize the findings, it should be done with cautiousness. Geographic limitation (Kronoberg County) and focus on one group of newcomers by country of origin, Afghanistan, are two major factors that have to be accounted as limits to the external validity and reliability of this study.

Another limitation concerns the retrospective interview method. As noted by McKenzie, this method has its limitations in regard to the troubles that respondents might have recalling some of the information encountered (McKenzie, 2003, p. 21). Therefore, it can be concluded that by using the method of retrospective interview, one can only collect the data about the encounters and practices that respondents themselves define as important and memorable. Accordingly, data acquired in this way has to be perceived as an image cognitively constructed by the respondents in accordance with their “mental models” of the world (Talja, et al., 2005, p. 83). Moreover, it is important to remember that, in line with the constructivist approach, these images and experiences are treated here as actually constructed during the interview (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008), so its context might be potentially distorting.

Due to the limitations in the language skills (Swedish and Dari), interviews were either conducted in English (in the “Key informants” group or interpreted from Dari to English (“Newcomers” group), which might have limited the richness of the accounts. Moreover, being a newcomer to Sweden myself, during this I had to learn how the Swedish system of governance works on different
levels. Yet, this factor might as well be seen as a positive one: a “fresh” view of the system helps to avoid taking its arrangements for granted.

3.7. Ethical Considerations and Challenges
When conducting this research, a number of ethical issues were taken into account. Firstly, a need existed to discuss sensitive topics – those related to the conflict and traumatic experience, and family members. Secondly, the issue of political sensitivity was also present, since some of the interview topics could be perceived as critics of the Swedish system. In the situation when some of the respondents are still in the asylum process and are concerned about their case, this issue had to be accounted for.

To accommodate these sensitivities, the following research principles were used: minimization of the risk of harm for the interviewees; informed consent to be a part of the study, which included clear communication about the intents of the researcher and goals of the project; protecting anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. It was also decided to exclude underage respondents from the sample. Alongside with the aim to narrow down the research scope, this decision was also based in the inability to receive a consent from the family of the respondent.

Since this research is based on the field methods, there also exists a risk of the shortcomings that can be hard to accommodate. These include difficulties with access to the speakers, language barrier, and failing to predict specific sensitivities of the interviewees, especially among the asylum seekers.
4. Findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the study in accordance with the main topics identified during the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (Appendixes D-F). The chapter starts with the short description of the reception process that begins at the Swedish border and, in the case of this study, ends in Kronoberg County. This part of the findings is based on the explanations provided by the interviewed experts in the field, representatives of the agencies, and accounts of the asylum seekers’ experiences.

The following sub-chapters provide answers to the two of the research questions of this research project that have a more descriptive nature: 1) What are the information practices used by the newcomers in Kronoberg? 2) What type of information and communication strategies are used in the integration process to ensure the right of the newcomers to relevant and accessible information? The findings are organized along the horizontal axis of the employed model, according to the Mwarigha’s (2002) “Stages of Settlement”.

4.1. Reception of the Asylum Seekers in Sweden: The Journey of the Afghan Newcomers to Kronoberg

Escaping various threats that one can face in Afghanistan, asylum seekers in many cases flee first to Iran or other neighboring countries (N1, N3, N7, N8). While entry points to Europe vary, refugees’ pass to Sweden usually includes countries like Austria, Germany, and Denmark (N1, N2, N6, N7, N8). Most of the respondent of this study entered Sweden in Malmö, by giving in to the local migration police (N1, N2, N6, N7, N8). At this point, there are two ways in which the asylum seekers can be sent to Kronoberg. The first one is voluntary, when the person himself chooses to be placed in the county to live with family members or friends (N1, N6). The second option is being assigned to move to Kronoberg by the migration police, in the case when the asylum seeker does not have preferences or a specific person he can live with (N2, N7, N8). Yet another, more direct way that brings the asylum seekers to Kronoberg is family reunification, when one member of the family (mostly husband) enters Sweden by giving in to the migration police, receives a residence permit, and asks for the Migration Board to allow his family members (mostly wife and children)

\[2\] Henceforward, “N…” stands for the respondents from the “Newcomers” and “KI…” – from the “Key Informants” group. See the codes explained in Appendix C.
to join him (N3). In this case, the invited family members receive the residence permit right away and can proceed to register themselves in different Swedish offices and systems.

Those who still need to wait for the decision of the Migration Board regarding the permit can be placed in the asylum home or asylum family housing (apartment): currently, these facilities are located in several municipalities in Kronoberg (N2, N6, N7, N8, KI4, KI5). After settling in the county, asylum seekers are supposed to be interviewed by the Migration Board and receive the decision regarding their residence permit. In the last two years, the waiting time has increased significantly. Some of the respondents of this study who arrived in Sweden in November-December 2015 are still waiting for the verdict of the Migration Board – for more than 16 months (N1, N6, N7, N8). During this period, asylum seekers are entitled to receive allowance payments and use the healthcare services free of charge, while their children can attend Swedish kindergartens and schools (N1, KI5).

After receiving their permits, newcomers are entitled to receive the same services as Swedish citizens. An additional option for them is Etablering, an Establishment Plan, offered by the Public Employment Service. It is designed individually for every newcomer after the interview and is adjusted to his educational background, work experience, skills, and preferences. This plan usually includes language courses, courses that provide information on the Swedish society, consultations on writing a Curriculum Vitae and job search. During the time when an individual is accomplishing the Establishment plan, he is paid a monthly allowance. This arrangement was envisaged as a means to allow the new arrivals to focus on improving their chances to get a job and get engaged in the actual job search (KI5, KI6). Still, it was identified during the interviews for this research project, that occasionally, newcomers don not understand the purpose of the programme to the full: some perceive the payments as a way to sustain themselves, with job search not considered as obligatory (N1, N2, KI6). In addition, respondents identify a widespread perception that women should not work, therefore the Establishment plan payments might be perceived as a resource that allows them to stay home and take care of the children (KI2, KI6, KI7).

4.2. Information Practices and Integration Process on the Immediate Stage of Settlement

Communication at this phase, as described in Mwarigha’s model, happens directly after the arrival of the migrant to the new country and concerns such basic topics as food, shelter, getting around, language barrier. It was identified during the interviews with the Afghan newcomers that most of
the topics in this range were addressed before their arrival to Kronoberg, during their first contact with the migration police in Malmö. On top of the topics mentioned by Mwarigha, an additional one arises in the stories of newcomers: “cards”, meaning the ID that is handed to the asylum seekers and the bank card that is used for allowance payments (N1, N8).

Upon arrival, McKenzie’s “By proxy” mode of information behavior was in place, when newcomers were identified as information seekers and approached by the source of information. Yet, the emotional state (N1, N3) and language skills combined with the absent or insufficient translation services (N2, N6, N8) in some cases didn’t allow the asylum seekers to understand the provided information fully (N1, N2, N6, N8). As one of the experts noted, “Someone asks you: “Have you understood this?””. You say politely “Yes, I have”. But in reality, they might not have understood anything, they just want to respect the authorities”.

The issue of information overload and stress during the contact with the migration police is accounted for in the integration strategy, so on arrival in Kronoberg, asylum seekers are provided with the additional one-day information session from the Migration Board and other major agencies, like the police (K18). Yet, within this study, respondents among newcomers did not recall this fact without a prompt.

4.3. Information Practices and Integration Process on the Intermediate Stage of Settlement

According to Mwarigha, after the initial issues are arranged, migrants get interested in the more complex issues, like access to various services, possibilities for employment, or finding accommodation.

In terms of the message, one of the first pieces of information that Afghan newcomers in Kronoberg are looking for are the opportunities to start Swedish language courses (N1, N2, KI1). Those who come to Sweden as the family members or for some other reason receive their residence permit right after arrival, are entitled to the free education through the system of “Swedish for Immigrants” (SFI) schools. Still, they need to start their Establishment Plan through the Public Employment Service first and/or find out which school they will attend. Those who start their asylum process upon arrival in Sweden have even more questions on this topic since they are not entitled to attend SFI until they receive the permission to stay in Sweden. As it was mentioned before, after the peak influx of the refugees to Sweden in 2015-2016, the waiting time might exceed 16 months (N1, N2, N6, N8). In
2017, recognizing the problem of “delayed” integration in terms of the language, Swedish Government empowered county administrative boards (länsstyrelsen) to provide funding to the NGOs in order to ensure a wider access of the asylum seekers to the educational activities (KI8, KI1, KI5).

Still, the issue of learning Swedish attracts a lot of attention (N1, N2, N7, KI3-6, KI8) since there is no easy answer. Language courses are provided by NGOs like Red Cross and Sensus, while language cafes are organized by numerous actors, including municipalities and churches. The task of finding them, contacting them, and securing a study place (in the case of the course) lies on the newcomer himself. Therefore, the active seeking strategy of information practice is required. Still, some newcomers find the process of getting into an organized language-related activity so difficult at first that they opt for self-study, with instruments ranging from children books to videos on YouTube (N1, N2, N3, N8). However, there were no respondents who reported on any significant progress resulting from the self-study.

Other popular questions at this stage, as identified both by the Afghan newcomers and service providers, are: finding accommodation, especially one that will allow the newcomer and his or her family to stay in the town where they have already established some contacts (N2, N4, KI3, KI5, KI7, KI8); asylum process, waiting time, interviews at the Migration Board (N2, KI1, KI8), family reunification (KI8); family economy, paying bills, and consumer rights (KI3, KI3, KI5, KI6); possibilities of employment, writing a CV (N2, KI1, KI6, KI8). Such services as healthcare, banking, and education, assigned by Mwarigha to this stage, were mentioned less often. Laws and political system were mentioned as important topics by the experts (KI5-7), but not by the newcomers – their interest to this topic on this stage is mostly limited to the asylum process issues mentioned above.

With all these issues on the table, the situation with possible sources gets significantly more complicated. As it was mentioned above, new actors get involved in the integration process, alongside with the new division of roles. Some of the services are now available only for those who hold a residence permit (e.g. Public Employment Service), while some can help all categories of migrants (NGOs). The scope of work of one agency – the Civic Office in Växjö seems to be not clear to the public since some experts tend to see it as a universal service for everyone (KI8), while others are convinced that it only works with the residence permit holders (KI1). In reality, this office
will accept all visitors, but due to the limited number of services that asylum seekers without permits are entitled to, it is difficult for the case managers to help them (KI2).

Generally, it turned out that “one window” type of information services available to all newcomers is not a universal practice for the reception and integration system. Such a center created in Alvesta is a unique case for Kronoberg, with the initiative coming from the local municipality (KI5, KI7).

Other structural factors seem to contribute to the misunderstanding: at this stage, different agencies report on receiving requests that lie beyond the scope of their responsibility, so their staff has to redirect the confused visitors (KI1-3, KI5-7). From the perspective of the recipient's characteristics, it has to be taken into account that many of the newcomers are in stress due to the situation they encountered at home, their travel to Sweden, life in the asylum home, or uncertainty of the asylum process (N1, N3, KI2, KI4, KI6). “Most of the time in first three of four months I spent at home, watching TV. I had no contacts, I was about to scream: “Why did I come here?”(N1). Some respondents say that they felt or still feel shy when initiating conversation or asking for help (N1, N3, N7, KI1). Another issue to be taken into account in terms of the recipient is the cultural background. It was noted by both service providers and newcomers themselves that traditionally, Afghan women might need to have husband’s permission or presence to talk to strangers, or at least to be accompanied by other family members (N1, N3, N5-8, KI6, KI7). It is important to note that service providers at different levels have policies to avoid the interference, where the husband might be asked to wait aside while the woman is talking to the officer or might be present, but will not be allowed to speak for his wife (KI2, KI6, KI8). Also, because of the significant differences in the cultures and ways of life, some Afghan newcomers do not realize that they lack some knowledge about the Swedish society. Therefore, they will not initiate active seeking on these topics (N2, KI4, KI5).

An informal network of contacts provides additional sources of information during this stage: relatives and friends (N1, N2, N4-6, KI2, KI7); Afghan migrants who moved to Sweden earlier (N2, N6, KI2-KI5, KI8); neighbors in the asylum housing (N2, N6,); opinion leaders or simply active fellow countrymen who share the same language (N6, KI1, KI4, KI5). Library is also mentioned as an organization that might be a source of information (i.e. books – N1, N2, N7, KI3) and support in receiving it (i.e. a librarian who helps newcomers to use computers – N1, N2, N6, N7, KI1, KI3).
In the circumstances described above, regional and local actors in the integration process employ different **strategies of informational behavior**. Some rely on the word of mouth to inform potential beneficiaries of their services (KI3, KI5), others publish their contacts on the local websites (KI2, KI8). Newcomers themselves name internet as one of the important channels of information seeking for them (N1-4, N7, N8). Specifically, some search for some topics of interest (N1, N3) or monitor social media – Facebook or Instagram (N1-3, N7).

While planning their communication activities, some of the agencies and organizations (e.g. Migration Board, Sensus, Red Cross) employ “By proxy” mode of information behavior. Service providers emphasize that personal visits and presentations are some of the most effective ways to reach the target audience and establish a meaningful contact (KI1-5, KI7, KI8). These visits are held at the places where newcomers spend their time: asylum homes (KI1, KI4, N1, N6, N8) and schools (KI1). A “digitalized” version of approaching by proxy is employed by Sensus, with a Viber group serving as a channel to announce events, as well as collect information on needs and opinions (KI4).

Using print materials – posters and brochures – as a medium to spread information is another important strategy, especially for the regional and local governmental agencies (KI2, KI4, KI7, KI8, N1, N6-8). From the perspective of the information behavior, two major strategies are in place. First one is non-direct monitoring, when newcomers “bump” into posters in unexpected places. For example, coming to Medborgarkontoret to ask about available accommodation, one might notice “Information Sverige” brochures that were located there by the Länsstyrelsen. This way of spreading print materials – by posting them in other organizations’ offices – is used by various actors (KI2, KI4, KI5, KI7, KI8). They strive to provide as many language versions as possible (KI3, KI4, KI8), but newcomers from Afghanistan note that in some cases Dari translation is not available (N1, N3, N8).

Another information behavior strategy that leads to consumption of information through print media is active scanning. An example of such a situation is looking for the opportunities to learn Swedish, trying to identify the possible source of information, and eventually – noticing posters or brochures in one of the meeting points, i.e. library (N1).

One type of print materials – letters – is important as a **channel** for the governmental agencies of different levels to inform the newcomers about the developments in their asylum process invite for a meeting or an interview (N1, N3, N4, N7, N8). Notably, this communication is conducted in
Swedish – as explained by the service providers, it is both a resource issue and an attempt to motivate migrants to learn the language (KI5, KI6).

In the cases of Internet as a channel and print materials as means of communication, an important limitation has to be taken into account. Some of the newcomers have little or no education (N1, N2, N5, KI2, KI4); no or little digital skills (N1, N8, KI3, KI4, KI6), or might not be used to paper-based communication and rely more on the personal communication (N1, KI1).

To sum up, Afghan newcomers in Kronoberg County employ all four types of information practices described by McKenzie. Active seeking is a must here, especially for the asylum seekers who have not yet received their residence permit (N1, N2, N7, N8). While having some questions, but not understanding clearly what the source of the information could be, newcomers engage in active scanning. Non-direct monitoring, defined by McKenzie as “serendipitous encounters in unexpected places”, is mostly applicable to the consumption of information through the print materials. Accounts of the situations, where newcomers are approached and informed by proxies, are also numerous and emphasized as important in both migrants’ and service providers’ stories.

4.4. Information Practices and Integration Process on the Long-term Stage of Settlement

Within Mwaringha’s model, at the long-term establishment stage newcomers need information on inclusion and integration according to their specific personal situation. Only some of the respondents can relate to these issues since others are still in the asylum process or haven’t arranged the issues from the previous stage (e.g. accommodation, employment, childcare). Therefore, this chapter is based on these several cases (N2, N4, N5), as well as on the projections for the future made by others.

During the discussion of the possibilities for long-term integration and personal development in the future in Sweden, in terms of the message, the topic of the newcomers getting in contact with Swedish people comes to the fore. The preferred outcome is coded as “having Swedish friends”. The indicators that respondents use to point out the degree of friendship here vary from being able to receive guidance in situations of uncertainty to being invited to the home of a Swedish person (“they even (!) invited me”) or receiving Swedish guests (N1, N2, N7, N8, KI1, KI5).
In addition to the emotional benefits that might result from such connections, it was identified that while other Afghans are perceived as the preferred source of information on the intermediate level of integration, on the “long-term” stage, Swedish people are mentioned as a better source of information (N2, KI1, KI3, KI8).

It was identified that on many occasions, respondents had their initial contact with the Swedish people in the organized environment, where locals play the role of volunteers of different specialized organizations and initiatives. Such situations include visiting languages cafes and other events aimed at integration or participating in the mentorship program (N1, N7, N8, KI1, KI3, KI5).

One of the possible difficulties of establishing communication with Swedish people concerns the stereotypical perception of them being shy and not talkative (N1, N2, N4, N7, N8, KI5). As one of the respondents noted: “I have read somewhere that Sweden is a cold country, so they are also “cold” people. When I came here – it turned out to be true” (N7). Obviously, such an attitude (as a characteristic of the recipient) towards the source of information might influence his decision to engage in information seeking or avoid. Still, respondents recall situations where they had to contact Swedish people, and these contacts changed their perception: in terms of the characteristics of the source of information (Berlo’s category of Attitude in this case), Swedes turned out to be friendly, helpful, and honest (N1, N2, N7).

In terms of characteristics of the recipient and their influence on the communication process, it was identified that even in the later stages of integration the issue of language skills is still in play. Even those respondents who stated they are proficient in Swedish, mention that occasionally they have problems understanding what was said or feel like they need to improve their knowledge in order to be integrated fully (N2, N4, KI2).

It might be noticed that both in the newcomers and experts’ groups, a normative stance is taken towards the initiative that a newcomer has to take in order to be integrated into the Swedish society. This comes in the form of “we/they need to learn their culture”, “we/they need to adjust ourselves”, “we/they need to learn the language” (N1, N2, N4, KI2, KI4, KI6). With these directives in mind, respondents tend to make another normative assumption – as to the need to employ the strategy of active information seeking in order to get to know Swedish society (“go out and ask”) or create the situations that enable non-direct monitoring, and therefore “bumping” into important information.
The later includes taking on a hobby – this non-work context is supposed to provide opportunities to receive information and get connected to the potential sources – Swedish people (N2, KI5).

4.5. The Missing Link: “Obvious” Knowledge

Both experts and newcomer note that there is a gap between the information needs and communication strategies on the local level. This gap concerns cultural differences: locals might not even realize that someone has to be informed of some “well-known” facts (N2, KI3, KI5). Notably, in the Swedish reception system, many of such cultural differences are accounted for. Firstly, some of these issues are covered by the introduction made by the Migration Board. Still, this introduction happens shortly after arrival, when asylum seekers are stressed, overloaded with information, and generally confused. As it was shown before in this chapter, many of them might not understand or remember the provided information. Another way to learn about the differences seems more operational. Included in the Establishment Plan, the 60-hour course on Swedish society provides more detailed information on the Swedish political system, laws, rights, family life, traditions, and other major topics. Importantly, this course is provided in the mother tongue of the newcomers, which not only allows for better understanding but also creates an enabling environment for them to ask questions (especially since the teacher usually comes from the same country of origin). Still, this course is currently available for the residence permit holders only and is limited in time, while the questions may arise continuously during the integration process. Service providers note in this connection, that they would find it helpful if more research on the unaccounted cultural differences and generally information needs of the newcomers was conducted (KI3, KI5).
5. **Analysis**

This chapter draws on the findings presented above to answer in an analytical manner the third research question of this study: is there congruence or contradiction between information practices used by the newcomers and communication strategies used in the integration process in Kronoberg? Since a relatively new theoretical approach was used in this study, one of the subchapters discusses its utility in the chosen research setting.

5.1. **Information Practices of the Newcomers and Integration Process: How the Parallel Worlds Emerge**

As it was identified before in the “Findings” chapter, respondents from the “Newcomers” group state that they turn to friends, family, and other Afghans who came to Sweden earlier as the preferred source of information, an alternative to the official information sources. Alongside the obvious reason – a shared language, some of the structural characteristics of the reception system might also play a role here.

The first factor that might influence the decision to avoid getting information from the official reception system is the strict division of responsibilities between different agencies in regard to their roles in the reception and integration process. It was emphasized by the service providers (KI2, KI7, KI6) that the staff of the governmental agencies can only provide information within the scope of work of their agency and cannot give any advice regarding other issues. Although understandable from the point of view of resources and validity of information, this approach is sometimes hard to understand from the perspective of other cultures (although, obviously, it depends a lot on the educational level of the new arrival, especially on his or her language and digital skills).

The analysis of the data collected from the experts provides evidence that proves that newcomers are generally confused with the division of the responsibilities in the system. During the interviews, most of the service providers recalled situations when newcomers would not understand the scope of their competence and made non-relevant requests for information. In these cases, according to the service providers, customers would be redirected to other agencies. Similar accounts come from the “Newcomers” group of respondents. For example, after arrival, some of the interviewed asylum seekers were interested in learning Swedish in the first place, so they turned to the agency they were dealing with at moment – the Migration Board. After being refused of receiving such information there (“they said I have to go look for some courses myself” (N1)), they had to find an agency that
could help with this issue, hence more active scanning and active information seeking. Here, instead of going to yet another office, some would turn to friends and neighbors, since they did not know who could help them with this issue within the official reception system.

The issue of the unclear division of responsibilities between the state agencies was recognized as serious enough to make for the content of a special educational course that is taught by the NGO “Sensus” in cooperation with the Växjö municipality. This course is being taught on demand, when there are enough interested newcomers to form a study group. Even so, it is presented almost every month since there are always enough of challenged new arrivals who need help with understanding where to go and how to talk to the officials (KI4).

The second factor that can influence the decision to avoid seeking information from the official reception system concerns the characteristics of the recipient, namely his psychological state. As it was mentioned in the findings, many of the newcomers are stressed because of the trauma received in their home country, during their journey, or even because of the long waiting time for the Migration Board’s decision. The last results in the continuous uncertainty and fear of being deported which, in turn, might result in being exposed to the old threats. On a few occasions, respondents mentioned that they were so overwhelmed by the new situation that they did not come out of their apartments for some time after arrival. As mentioned in the “Findings” chapter of this paper, being in such a disturbed psychological state, some newcomers feel shy and uncomfortable when the need arises to go out, meet new people from a different culture in the official setting and ask questions. Therefore, it might be assumed that the “Active seeking” mode of receiving information is not applicable here because of, in Berlo’s terms, the characteristics of the potential recipient.

A few other important details were identified here in regard to the issue of the unwillingness to speak to the officials. The first one is trust – a topic that was brought about in different contexts and with different accents but was later solidified during the thematic analysis. It was mentioned by one of the respondents that he would talk to the Migration Board on most of the issues that he needs to resolve, but for the “private matters” regarding his case he would rather consult his friend, an Afghan refugee who has already gone through the asylum-seeking process and can share his own experience. Another respondent mentioned that he does not feel like his acquaintances trust “the papers they give” in the state agencies. Therefore, these people would rather confirm the information received from the official sources by talking to their friends from Afghanistan. To avoid building the argument on anecdotal accounts, the issue of trust was discussed with the key informants that
can generalize based on their experience of communicating with numerous newcomers. A service provider who confirmed the lack of trust or even fear of the officials provides an additional point of view on the possible reasons. “I think for asylum seekers there are so many places where you cannot trust […] A lot of Swedish people, they are used to trust the system. It is going to work, if “they” said this will happen – okay, we trust them. But it looks very differently from the other countries”, – he explains. In the situation of newcomers from Afghanistan, with questions being constantly raised by the international community and human rights activists towards the practices used by the local officials, this possible explanation is worth taking into account (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016).

Another structural reason that might influence the attitude towards the encounters with the state agencies of different levels is the inability of the new arrivals to predict the availability of interpreting. People coming to Sweden from Afghanistan mostly speak Dari. According to the respondents from the “Newcomers” group, the degree to which information in Dari is available in different agencies varies greatly. In most cases, print materials are translated to Dari, as well as some of the “centralized” information services: for example, the national customer service call center of the Migration Board or the web page about Swedish life and society – “Information om Sverige”. At the same time, all the respondents from the “Newcomers” group, regardless of the time of arrival in Sweden, recalled situations that happened to them or their acquaintances when interpreting during face-to-face contacts was not provided. Those who can speak English underline how important this skill was (and still is in some cases) for information seeking. Respondents in the “Key Informants” group admit that interpreting to Dari is not always available on demand during the meetings, moreover – an interpreter has to be booked in advance. Therefore, in some cases when visitors come and request a meeting being held in Dari, they might be asked to go home and come back another day, so that services could be booked in advance. In addition to the need to go around different offices that would only answer to some questions. Along with the actual frustration of such unsuccessful information encounters, situations like this might demotivate the new arrivals from contacting the state agencies to receive information.

All of the abovementioned structural factors that concern the attitude of the potential recipient to the source of information, add to the confusion that newcomers find themselves in. It often results in joining an informal communication network within one ethnic group. Some of the important features of such alternative systems are discussed further.
5.2. Alternative Information Systems: In Search of Guidance

Due to the structural reasons mentioned above, as well as the language issue, and mere psychological need of relating to someone alike, turning to friends or at least fellow countrymen for advice seems to be a strong preference for the newcomers as a strategy to receive information. Another important issue to be mentioned here is the search for guidance.

In his earlier works that lead to the development of the everyday information practices theory, Savolainen (1995) distinguishes between two types of information that an individual needs to achieve “the mastery of life”: practical information related to solving specific problems, and more general, orienting information. Importantly, he defines more passive information-seeking techniques, like monitoring as the primary means of receiving such information from the environment. Savolainen describes “routine, sometimes absent-minded watching of television news” as one of the examples of such monitoring (Ibid, p. 273). This example already emphasizes the fact that newcomers in a new country might not be able to use such traditional techniques of casual environment monitoring in search of orienting information: they simply do not know the language to do so, especially at the initial stages.

Therefore, it is not surprising that for many newcomers a need arises to receive such information from other sources. This comes out as especially important if one keeps in mind the structural limitations of the reception system mentioned above. It includes the need to run around different offices, where every staff member can only provide you with specific facts on his narrow topic (Savolainen’s practical information aimed at problem-solving), while general orienting information might be missing. One of the experts interviewed during this study noted: “If you cannot understand the society, you need to rely on someone. […] As an officer of the state board I cannot take sides. You cannot support a person on a more individual basis, recommend either that track or another. As an officer in a regional or state board, I can just deliver information in the more objective manner”.

One source that can provide guiding and orienting information here is people who come from the same country of origin. Usually, newcomers would turn to those who arrived earlier and has experience of dealing with the Swedish reception system. Another option would be local opinion leaders: socially active countrymen that usually can speak Swedish (or at least English), volunteer, do internships or work for one of the integration initiatives, follow the news and are active on social media. It was established that in the case of Afghani newcomers in Kronoberg a few of such figures are mentioned as the source of information about integration events and educational opportunities.
In one case, the whole extended family was informed through the contact of one of its members with such an opinion leader. This example brings about the wider topic: with the facilitation from such opinion leaders, parallel informal networks of communication develop.

Importantly, hiring “new Swedes”, integrated migrants, to work as managers and interpreters in the state agencies might be an effective way to facilitate communication, but it is not an equivalent to supporting local opinion leaders in terms of its effectiveness. Transferred to the official situation with strictly defined limits and scope of responsibilities, these figures would lose their guiding potential, which builds on the personal approach and ability to answer many different questions at once.

Another valuable remark here comes from one of the experts working with newcomers in the NGO sector. “We know that there is a clash between individualism here in Sweden and collectivism and accent on the family from the other countries. People need to relate to someone”, – he explains. Therefore, it might be seen as inevitable that newcomers, especially from the Eastern cultures, will create their own parallel communication networks in Sweden, relying on friends, family, and opinion leaders that come from the same country of origin.

From this perspective, current reception policy in Sweden has a flaw in terms of settlement mechanisms. At the initial stage, newcomers are put in the asylum homes and start to create their network of contacts, make friends and involve in other meaningful connections. After asylum process is finished and residence permit is released, to stay in the place one has got used too, he needs to look for accommodation himself. Otherwise, chances are that accommodation arranged by authorities will be in another town or village, which will disrupt the established connections. It was mentioned before that service providers state that finding accommodation “to stay” is one of the most popular questions they receive from the newcomers that turn to them for information.

5.3. Implications for the Integration Process

The existence of the parallel information networks of migrants might be seen as a negative phenomenon that prevents newcomers from integration. As argued above, though, it might also be a valuable addition to the official reception system, serving as an effective information channel. As for the “isolation” effect, it might and is been fought against by the local NGOs in Kronoberg, with a range of integration activities in use. Language cafes are one of the most popular activities
organized by local volunteer groups, churches, and libraries. These events are mentioned by many newcomers as a place where they met Swedish people and made friends. Still, relying primarily on this type of activities might not be enough. Firstly, as it was noted by one of the service providers, it might be a challenge to attract younger Swedes to participate in these activities, while already retired citizens would participate eagerly. This, in a way, limits the chances for the newcomers of the working age to meet people with shared interests. Another weak side of the language cafes as the meeting points is the proportion of Swedish people and newcomers participating. It seems less likely to establish a meaningful relationship in the situation when every local is supposed to talk to several new arrivals at the same time.

From this point of view, different formats of mentorship programmes seem like a more promising means of making people meet. Here, different matching mechanisms allow to put people together according to the shared family situation (e.g. families that have small children), interests, and within one age group. Moreover, the mentorship approach addresses the abovementioned issue of the newcomers’ need for guidance: a mentor is a person you can turn for any type of questions, as well as personal advice. As it was identified earlier, Swedish people are perceived as a better source of information for the long-term integration – i.e., for career advice or recommendations regarding the housing market. Therefore, although turning to their countrymen for advice on the intermediate level of communication might be the preferred strategy, Swedish mentors might still have their own “niche” in the communication process. In this regard, support to the local organizations that provide this type of programmes is crucial in terms of neutralizing the isolating effect of the ethnic information exchange networks. Yet again, this does not mean that such networks should be seen in the negative light: with enough attention to the integration activities in each individual case, participating in such a network might be beneficial for the newcomers.

5.4. A Special Case: Letters and Motivation to Learn Swedish
It was stated by the respondents among the new arrivals that the letters with important information they receive from the different agencies are in Swedish, without a Dari version (although the information on the language one speaks is collected upon arrival). This no-translation practice starts from the first letters that newcomers receive not long after arrival. These might be the letters from the Migration Board, information on the contacts of the local hospital, announcements of appointments and interviews. At first sight, this fact can easily be explained by the mere factor of the limited resources. Yet, since the issue was brought up by one of the new arrivals as problematic,
it was decided to include it into the questionnaire for the interviews with the services providers. It turned out that at least some of them actually perceive the communication via letters in Swedish as one of the ways to motivate the newcomers to learn the language faster (KI5, KI6).

Two objections to this way of thinking might be drawn from the research results presented earlier in this paper. Firstly, in the situation of stress, confusion with the reception system and provided services, putting additional pressure on the information recipient does not seem to be reasonable. It is doubtful that the learning effect from reading several letters in Swedish is significant enough to outweigh the potential delays, missed opportunities, and frustration caused by misunderstanding the letter. Moreover, since, as it was discussed above, at the start of the asylum process most of the new arrivals struggle to find a course of Swedish to attend, it is also doubtful that they can make reading of these letters a part of a consistent learning process (see the “Findings” chapter for the accounts of the limited effect of self-study).

Secondly, imposing the need to translate letters from Swedish is supposed to develop the recipient’s language skills and, therefore, empower him or her. In fact, this approach might as well deepen the dependency of the newcomers, especially at the initial stages of integration. One of the examples of possible scenarios comes directly from a respondent who moved to Kronoberg recently to reunite with her husband, an asylum seeker: “I have this problem with letters in Swedish. I have to wait for my husband to translate them for me. Or use “Google Translate”, but it is not just one paper! It can be three or four papers. They write me about Arbetsformedlingen [Swedish Public Employment Service], and I should read it, but I cannot. I have to wait for my husband, and then he has to come home and translate. Sometimes he is tired or might just forget”(N3).

The situation might not even have a gender accent to it, but rather an educational one. One of the service providers noted in regard to the letters that “If you have something written, you can use Google Translator”. As it was demonstrated earlier in the “Findings” chapter, both newcomers themselves and practitioners within the field of integration note that many new arrivals do not have proper skills of using ICT or even basic education that would allow them to read and use internet for translation. In these cases, the recipients of the letters turn to the staff of the asylum home of friends for help with translation, which, obviously, does not foster independence of the subject. Moreover, the need to expose personal information (or something that might seem as personal before the recipient can read it) to other people might cause additional stress.
Finally, a third, merely logical objection, concerns the issue of the limited resources. Since the contents of the letters mentioned by the newcomers is, in most cases, standardized – like a doctor’s appointment or invitation for an interview, introducing a second, translated version of the letter would not require significant expenses. All in all, both the attitude and norms that make agencies communicate with the asylum seekers in Swedish without translation to their native languages might be revised.


The study of information practices of newcomers from Afghanistan in Kronoberg County demonstrates that active, purposeful information-seeking is an important part of the information behavior. Still, it is clearly not the only strategy that is used by this group and might not even be the most important one. This adds to the understanding that older theories that focus on information seeking only are limited in their representation of the human information behavior.

One of the main reasons that weaken the positions of active information seeking, in terms of the Berlo’s model, lies in the characteristics of the recipient. In the chosen research setting, the ability and willingness to use these practices – go out, ask directly, or use search engines via the Internet – might be limited by the recipient’s:

- low general educational level, especially reading skills;
- low language proficiency, especially in Swedish and English;
- limited digital skills and experience of the previous use of ICT;
- personal characteristics, like shyness;
- psychological state (i.e. trauma received at home, or/and during the journey, the stress of waiting for the decision on the residence permit and fear of deportation; the stress of living in the asylum home; the general stress of moving to the new country;
- cultural norms (especially views on gender roles and proper behavior for women).

In terms of the source of information, which is often Swedish people, it might be assumed that the popular stereotype about Swedes being shy and not talkative might influence the newcomers’ willingness to contact and search information from them, limiting the use of “active seeking” strategy. Yet, it can be seen from the findings of this research project that this stereotype, although popular, holds only until newcomers receive a personal experience of communicating with Swedes.
Generally, respondents of this study emphasized that they see Swedish people as friendly, helpful, and kind (even if not extroverted and source of initiative in the communication process).

Another factor that adds to the importance of what McKenzie calls “less directed” practices is the extent to which the situation is new for Afghan asylum seekers in Sweden. The need to operate in a new country with another climate, political and economic situation, cultural and religious background, the system of public services creates so many gaps in the knowledge that one can barely realize their number and extent. As noted by numerous proponents of traditional theories of information behavior, information need and subsequent purposeful action to fulfill it, both originate in the individual’s recognition that his knowledge is insufficient to perform some tasks. In a situation of migration, especially forced, hence not always well-prepared, the subject might find it hard to understand what are the demands put on him by the host society and what tasks stem from them.

Therefore, related pieces of information cannot be searched for purposefully, they can only be transmitted through “By proxy” or “Non-direct monitoring” strategies. Some of the bright examples were provided by the respondents of this study. In one case, it was unexpected for the newcomer that he is not allowed to carry a knife on him in Sweden. Since it is normal in Afghanistan, it does not come up to one’s mind to ask if it is accepted in Sweden – the respondent “bumped” into this information non-purposefully, during the introduction by the proxy, the Migration Board. Another example would be parenting, where Afghan parents might perceive physical punishment as a norm, not realizing that it might be different in Sweden, therefore not looking for any special information on these issues.

The findings of this research also provide the evidence in support of Savolainen’s approach in terms of the contexts for information practices. In one of his earlier articles that develop the basis for the theory, Savolainen (1995, p. 266) uses an example of language courses and argues that division between work and non-work information seeking is not valid because these two contexts might overlap. In the situation of newcomers in Kronoberg, the very same issue of looking for the language courses can be used as an example. It is, at the same time, work-related (Swedish is essential for finding a job) and nonwork-related: Swedish is needed generally, to read, talk to people, and make friends. This overlap is in a way recognized in the Swedish national integration policy. Learning the language might be seen as part of the general integration and be put in the area of responsibility of the local municipalities. Still, it is recognized to be the part of the job-seeking process at the same
time, therefore language learning is included in the Establishment plan administered by the Public Employment Service.

The criticism of this evidence might be based on the fact that the case of forced displacement, especially between two countries that differ so significantly and in many ways, is unique and extreme. This means that the findings cannot be generalized and the research design might not be operational in other, less acute contexts. The counterargument here builds on the fact that, according to the UNHCR, more than 64 people were the agency’s “population of concern” as of January 2016, which might change the view on the forced displacement as on the unique situation (UNHCR, 2017, p. 17). As for the significant differences between the country of origin and hosting country, the recent influx of the refugees from the Middle East to Europe is yet another example of the tendency of the globalization of forced migration with longer refugee journeys. Therefore, the study of the information practices of the Afghan newcomers in the Kronoberg County of Sweden provides evidence to the importance of different modes of information practices described by Savolainen and McKenzie (in contrast to the one-mode models). Moreover, this evidence is based on the research in a setting that is and might be of the future interest of the academia.

In terms of the applied analytical model, the combination of McKenzie’s, Mwarigha’s, and Berlo’s models developed for this study has proved operational in the chosen theoretical and practical contexts. The last one helped to structure both interview guides and thematic maps used in the research: the factors that influence the information practice were divided into the categories of source, message, channel, and recipient. This allowed to identify the relations between different elements of the information practice that explain the choice of different modes – from active seeking to relying on the proxy. For example, the message might be coded in the way that the educational level of the recipient does not allow to decode: the situation of the print materials and newcomers that cannot read or do not know Swedish. In this case, the envisaged non-direct monitoring (when user “bumps” into information passing by a poster or brochures displayed on the information board) will not happen. Instead, the newcomer chooses to engage in a different strategy – active seeking – with another source – his Afghan friends who have already spent some time in the country and obtained personal experience of integration.
6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provides a short summary of the findings and conclusions drawn from the analysis in the previous chapters. In addition, some recommendations in terms of policymaking and further research on the topic are provided here.

6.1. Conclusions Drawn from the Findings and Analysis

The first research question of this study focuses on the information practices that are employed by newcomers from Afghanistan in the Kronoberg County in Sweden. By applying a combination of analytical models, these practices were identified here on the three stages of settlement: immediate, intermediate, and long-term integration. It was observed that in most cases asylum seekers receive information on their immediate needs even before coming to Kronoberg, during their encounter with the Swedish Migration police. In terms of the information practices, newcomers mostly receive information in the “approached by a proxy” mode, without engaging in active information seeking. This transition happens on the next stage, when after moving to Kronoberg new arrivals start to look for information about different services available to them, housing, and possibilities of employment. Here, both newcomers and service providers emphasize the need to go out and ask questions. Moreover, the strategies of active scanning and non-direct monitoring are also in use, when new arrivals look for information sources or accidentally encounter important information on posters, brochures, or overhearing during different events.

The second research question of this study focuses on the communication strategies that are used in the integration process to ensure the right of the newcomers to relevant and accessible information. It was identified in this study that on the national level, communication of the agencies in the reception system requires the newcomers to employ the “active seeking” strategy. On the regional and local level, communication strategies include the production of print materials, which allows the newcomers to receive information from accidental encounters, mostly in the “non-direct monitoring” mode. Judging from the accounts provided by the respondents from the “Newcomers” group, NGOs employ more pro-active approaches. They visit asylum houses, language schools, and other potential meeting places to inform the new arrivals of the integration activities they organize.

In the analytical part of this paper, findings on the first two question are discussed as well as the answer to the last research question: is there congruence or contradiction between the information practices used by newcomers and communication strategies used in the integration process in
Kronoberg? It was established that during their integration, newcomers, in Savolainen’s terms, try to achieve “mastery of life” in their new situation. This requires both separate pieces of information to accomplish specific tasks and general orienting information that helps to understand and manage the new “order of things”. The integration process in Kronoberg is divided between state actors of different levels, as well as non-governmental organizations, which means that one actor can usually provide a narrow range of information in his area of responsibility. This allows to provide newcomers with detailed and to the point information that helps them solve specific tasks that arise in the integration process. Therefore, it might be stated that there is at least a partial congruence between the newcomers’ information practices and integration efforts in Kronoberg.

Still, looking for the right source of information is often a challenging process, especially for the new arrivals with a limited educational background, and every failed attempt to receive information leads to more confusion. Moreover, since officers in the state agencies are limited in their interactions with newcomers by strict rules, in most cases they cannot provide personal guidance through the whole integration process. Therefore, new arrivals from Afghanistan search for the general orienting information from the other sources: NGOs, relatives, friends, neighbors, countrymen that arrived in Sweden earlier, local activists and opinion leaders that come from the same country of origin. Alongside the language problem, this strategy allows newcomers to resolve some of the more complex issues, like lack of trust, cultural differences, and need of psychological support.

6.2. Policy Recommendations

Existing situation of the two parallel systems of communication in the integration process can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, the informal network is a more flexible addition to the communication strategy employed by the official system of reception. By providing support and building the capacity of the local activists and opinion leaders, authorities of different levels can foster the establishment of the new arrivals in Kronoberg.

On the other hand, there is a risk that developed informal communication networks within the groups of people of the same origin will impede the integration of the newcomers in the Swedish society. If all the needed information can be received through one’s fellow countrymen, there could be not enough motivation for some of the new arrivals to learn Swedish, make Swedish friends, and generally participate in the social life outside their ethnic group. Therefore, while supporting
activists and opinion leaders among newcomers is expected to have a positive impact on the integration process on the intermediate level, it is crucial to follow them up with activities aimed at fostering connections between Swedes and newcomers. This might include organizing and supporting mentorship programmes that allow for a long-term guided communication between individuals and families.

6.3. Recommendations for Further Research

As it was mentioned in the Introduction chapter, this research project focuses on the narrow context – integration of the Afghan newcomers in Kronoberg County of Sweden – to ensure an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions. Still, current migration situation in Sweden calls for more similar projects to explore information practices of various ethnic groups of newcomers in different locations and types of settlements (i.e. urban and rural). The results of such research projects can serve as important reference materials for local policymakers. It might be assumed here that better communication strategies will accelerate the integration process, helping newcomers to start participating and contributing to the Swedish society faster and resolve the tensions that arise in connection to migration.

Also, some of the findings of the thesis that were out of its scope might be worth of the researchers’ attention. Those are: local decision-making and its role in the reception and integration system; online activism and information sharing by opinion leaders among the newcomers; psychological state of the asylum seekers and its influence on the effectiveness of the integration activities.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide Group 1 – Refugees and Asylum Seekers

General Information on the Respondent
- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Family status
- Education
- Occupation
- Legal status in Sweden
- Time spent in Sweden
- Languages spoken

Introduction to the main conversation:
- Please, tell us how you got to live here, to Kronoberg?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of settlement</th>
<th>Immediate</th>
<th>Intermediate (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>1) When you arrived in Kronoberg, what was the first information that was important for you to know? [Respondent gives an example of topic].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) How did you try to receive it? Did you ask? Scanned possible sources? Stumbled upon it in unexpected places? Someone told you? [Respondent chooses a mode, the following questions are adapted accordingly]:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) a) If you asked, how did you choose the actual source? b) If you looked for the source of the information, where did you decide to look for it? c) If you found the information unexpectedly, where did it come from? d) If someone approached you, who was it, where did this happen and under which circumstances?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Was your source friendly, easy to understand, respectful? Did it seem knowledgeable?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) In what form/through which channel did you receive the information (e.g. conversation, brochure, website link)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) How difficult was it to understand it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7) How did you feel during this encounter?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8) So, after all, can you say that you received the information that you needed or that became important later?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several thematic encounters]

Additional questions:
- What information was missing and you only learned it much later?

Thematic prompts for this stage: food, shelter, getting around, means to address the language barrier.

[Questions 2-8 are the same as in the previous section]

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several thematic encounters]

Additional questions:
- What information was missing and you only learned it much later?
Thematic prompts for this stage: education, healthcare, housing, employment, communication with state agencies; use of Internet, print materials.

Long-term (if applicable)

1) What information is important for you to know in regards to the long-term integration?
   [Respondent gives an example of topic].

[Questions 2-8 are the same as in the previous section]

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several thematic encounters]

Additional questions:
- Is there information that is missing and you cannot get it?

Thematic prompts for this stage: long-term integration into Swedish society, subject’s perspectives for personal development in Sweden.

Additional questions
- In your opinion, how can informing be improved for people who are in a situation like you were/are?
- How would you recommend to look for the information for someone who finds himself in a situation similar to yours?
Appendix B: Interview Guide Group 2 – Key Informants

Background Information on the Respondent
- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Level of education
- Position
- Place of work
- Geography of the subject’s operation

Introduction to the main conversation:
- What is your organization’s role in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Kronoberg?
- What is your personal role in this process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of settlement</th>
<th>Main Questions Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Immediate           | 1) In your opinion, when newcomers arrive in Kronoberg, what is the first information that is important for them to know?  
[Respondent gives an example of topic].  
2) How can they receive it? Do they need to ask? Scan possible sources? Stumble upon it in unexpected places? Wait for someone to tell them?  
[Respondent chooses a mode, the following questions are adapted accordingly]:  
3) a) If they decide to ask for the information, who can they turn to?  
b) If they look for the source of the information, where can they look for it?  
c) If they find the information unexpectedly, from the environment, where can it come from?  
d) If someone approaches them, who this is, where can this happen and under which circumstances?  
4) Do you think the sources is friendly, easy to understand, respectful? Are they knowledgeable? How is it ensured?  
5) How can this information get to the subjects, through which channel and in what form? (e.g. conversation, brochure, website link)?  
6) In your opinion, how difficult is it for them to understand the message?  
7) In your opinion, how do they feel during this encounter?  
8) So, after all, can you say that the information retrieval on this topic is generally successful? |

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several topics]

Additional questions:
- Do you think some of the information is missing at this stage?

Thematic prompts for this stage: food, shelter, getting around, means to address the language barrier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate (if applicable)</th>
<th>Main Questions Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                           | 1) In your opinion, after newcomers settle more or less in Kronoberg, what information is important for them to know in terms of a more prolonged settlement?  
[Respondent gives an example of topic].  
[Questions 2-8 are the same as in the previous section] |

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several topics]

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Additional questions:
- Do you think some of the information is missing at this stage?

Thematic prompts for this stage: education, healthcare, housing, employment, communication with state agencies; use of Internet, print materials.

Long-term (if applicable) 1) In your opinion, what information is important for the newcomers to know in regard to the long-term integration?
[Respondent gives an example of topic].

[Questions 2-8 are the same as in the previous section]

[Repeat to collect the accounts of several topics]

Additional questions:
- Do you think there is information on this stage that is hardly ever available for the newcomers?

Thematic prompts for this stage: long-term integration into Swedish society, subject’s perspectives for personal development in Sweden.

Additional questions - In your opinion, how can informing be improved for refugees and asylum seekers in Kronoberg?
Appendix C: List of Interviews

Group 1: Newcomers

N1  Gender: male;  
    Age: 27;  
    Marital status: single;  
    Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
    Occupation: part-time job and internship via NGOs;  
    Place of residence: Växjö;  
    Type of residence: with a family member;  
    Legal status: asylum seeker;  
    Time spent in Sweden: 16 months;  
    Dari, Pashto, English.

N2  Gender: male;  
    Age: 25;  
    Marital status: Married, 1 child;  
    Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
    Occupation: studies at school for over-age students; studies nursing through distant learning programme; part-time job;  
    Place of residence: Ljungby municipality;  
    Type of residence: rented apartment;  
    Legal status in Sweden: permanent residence permit;  
    Time spent in Sweden: 3 years, since 2014;  
    Languages spoken: Dari, Pashto, English, Swedish.

N3  Gender: female;  
    Age: 25  
    Marital status: married;  
    Education: unfinished Bachelor’s degree;  
    Occupation: housewife;  
    Place of residence: Alvesta;  
    Type of residence: with a family member;  
    Legal status in Sweden: residence permit, family reunification;  
    Time spent in Sweden: 1 month;  
    Languages spoken: Dari, English.

N4  Gender: female;  
    Age: 29;  
    Marital status: single;  
    Education: high school diploma, courses for grownups received in Sweden;  
    Occupation: interpreter;  
    Place of residence: Växjö;  
    Type of residence: rented apartment;  
    Legal status in Sweden: permanent residence permit;  
    Time spent in Sweden: 9 years;  
    Languages spoken: Dari, Swedish.

N5  Gender: female;  
    Age: 54;  
    Marital status: married, three grownup children;  
    Education: hasn’t attended school;
Occupation: housewife;  
Place of residence: Växjö;  
Type of residence: rented apartment;  
Legal status in Sweden: permanent residence permit;  
Time spent in Sweden: 6 years;  
Languages spoken: Dari.

N6  
Gender: female;  
Age: 40;  
Marital status: married;  
Education: hasn’t attended school;  
Occupation: housewife;  
Place of residence: Växjö;  
Type of residence: asylum home;  
Time spent in Sweden: 16 months;  
Languages spoken: Dari.

N7  
Gender: male;  
Age: 19;  
Marital status: single;  
Education: 6 years of school;  
Occupation: volunteering, internship via an NGO;  
Place of residence: Växjö;  
Type of residence: asylum home;  
Time spent in Sweden: 23 months;  
Languages: Dari, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, English.

N8  
Gender: male;  
Age: 30  
Marital status: married, 2 children;  
Education: high school diploma;  
Occupation: unemployed;  
Place of residence: Lammhult, Växjö municipality;  
Type of residence: state-provided asylum housing (apartment);  
Time spent in Sweden: 19 months;  
Languages spoken: Dari.

Group 2: Key Informants

KI1  
Name: Viktor Lundin;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 28;  
Education: university courses;  
Position: Integration Developer;  
Place of work: Red Cross Växjö;  
Geography of operation: Växjö;  
Type and level of organization: NGO.

KI2  
Name: Abdalaziz Mahdi;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 30;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: case worker;  
Place of work: Medborgarkontoret;
**KI3**
Name: Jonas Tistelgren;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 39;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: librarian, coordinator of language cafes;  
Place of work: Växjö City Library;  
Geography of operation: Växjö, Braås;  
Type and level of organization: state, local level.

**KI4**
Name: Maha Ibrahim;  
Gender: female;  
Age: 39;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: Project Leader for the Participation project;  
Place of work: Sensus;  
Geography of operation: Växjö;  
Type and level of organization: NGO.

**KI5**
Name: Per-Olof Hjälmefjord;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 61;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: Integration developer;  
Place of work: Alvesta Municipality;  
Geography of operation: Alvesta municipality;  
Type and level of organization: state, local level.

**KI6**
Name: Hasse Hassan Abughoula;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 48;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: employment officer;  
Place of work: Swedish Public Employment Service;  
Geography of operation: Växjö municipality;  
Type and level of organization: state, national level.

**KI7**
Name: Usama Hussein Salih;  
Gender: male;  
Age: 27 years;  
Education: high school;  
Position: officer;  
Place of work: Alvesta Information Center;  
Geography of operation: Alvesta municipality;  
Type and level of organization: state, local level.

**KI8**
Name: Gisela Andersson;  
Gender: female;  
Age: 52;  
Education: Bachelor’s degree;  
Position: Head of Integration Department;  
Place of work: Kronoberg County Administrative Board;  
Geography of operation: Kronoberg County;  
Type and level of organization: state, regional level.
Appendix D: Thematic Map – Immediate Stage of Settlement

- **Recipient**
  - Stress
  - Overload of information
  - Lack of language skills
  - Allowance
  - Shelter
  - Food
  - Bank card, ATMs
  - Re-settlement to Kronoberg

- **Message**
  - Lack of education
  - Lack of translation

- **Channel**
  - Print: brochures
  - In person

- **Source**
  - Migration police in Malmö
  - Additional: Migration Board in Växjö

- **Recipient**
  - Message
  - Channel
  - Source
Appendix E: Thematic Map – Intermediate Stage of Settlement

Recipient
- Women need a proxy to communicate
- Psychological state
- Shyness
- Trust to officials
- Cultural differences
- Lack of language skills
- Lack of digital skills
- Lack of education

Channel/Means:
- Visit to asylum home
- Library
- Internet
- Appointment
- School
- Print
- Jobs
- Economy
- Accommodation

Message
- Healthcare
- How system works

Source
- Afghan opinion leaders
- Official agencies
- NGOs
- Afghan people who came earlier
- Neighbors in asylum home
- Family/friends
- Asylum process
- Jobs
- Economy
- Accommodation
Appendix F: Thematic Map – Long-term Stage of Settlement

Recipient
- Long-term problems with understanding language
- Wish to have Swedish friends

Message
- Accommodation
- Social Norms
- Career development

Source
- Swedish people
- Kind, helping
- Shy, hard to make friends
- Good source
- Personal communication

Channel
- We/they must adjust ourselves