

Social Participation as Reported by Civil Servants and Volunteers Working with Newly Arrived Immigrants in Sweden: Qualitative Data from a Delphi Study

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Abstract. Primary health prevention regarding social participation for newly arrived immigrants is needed to address challenges when responding to the needs of such immigrants in their new and vulnerable situation. The aim of this study was to describe social participation as reported by civil servants and volunteers working with newly arrived immigrants in Sweden. Open-ended data collected in a Delphi project targeting civil servants and volunteers working within the policy establishment programme was used. Qualitative content analysis was conducted. The findings show that several interacting factors contribute to resources that create prerequisites for “going native in the community” and “being part of everyday life” as points of prerequisites for how civil servants and volunteers elaborate on social participation for newly arrived immigrants. A focus on the “here and now” and avoiding measures that “put life on hold” are two points of aspects that generate possibilities for promoting social participation in health services.

Keywords: *Health promotion, Health services, Newly arrived immigrants, Qualitative content analysis, Refugees, Social participation*

Introduction

During the 2000s, immigration to Sweden has being highest ever in 2016 with over 163,000 immigrants (SCB 2019). In Sweden, newly arrived immigrants (i.e. individuals that have been granted a residence permit) are offered to participate in an establishment programme (EP) aiming to accelerate and facilitate the introduction to working and social life, by assisting the individual to learn Swedish, find work and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The programme is full-time and the individual who participates can apply for economic benefits from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. The responsibility for the implementation of the EP lies with the municipalities, and it is the civil servants from the municipalities in cooperation with civil servants from the employment services that coordinate the activities locally. Even volunteers support the new arrivals with many matters that

municipalities do not help with, such as getting furniture for the newly arrived immigrants' homes, with language cafes, and leisure activities. In general, the civil servants in collaboration with volunteers help the newly arrived immigrants with introduction to different aspects of social life (Government Bill 2016; Swedish public employment service 2020).

Social participation is an important way of involving vulnerable groups e.g. newly arrivals in everyday life in the new country and increasing their access to, use of and ultimately, the overall effectiveness of health services available for them. According to the World Health Organisation, social participation is based on the promotion of between health services and empowerment of vulnerable groups (CSDH 2008).

The work related and economic prerequisites for the civil servants are of vital importance to successful adjustment of new arrivals during the introduction program. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the process of supporting new arrivals also involves aid agencies dealing with emotional and ethical dilemmas (Eggebo 2012; Puthoopparambil, Ahlberg et al. 2015).

Civil servants face a variety of challenges when responding to the needs of the immigrants as they adapt to their new situation. For example, there may be cultural, social, economic, and health needs or language barriers (CSDH 2008). In addition, issues with bureaucracy, including time pressures linguistic and cultural differences and lack of continuity in the immigration process could create challenges (Eriksson and Larsen 2019; van Loenen et al. 2018).

However, there has been a shift regarding the concerns for the health and wellbeing of newly arrived immigrants where the responsibilities for addressing these issues have moved from the health care system to civil servants and the connected voluntary work done by civic organisations. This shift is interesting to investigate, not least from a health services perspective since there is a need to understand social participation as a fundamental aspect of health-promoting activities. Many unknown stressors exist to understand how primary health prevention can be applied for refugees and thereby also to work with evidence-based assessment and intervention for this group (Neuman 1995; Roy 2009).

The aim of this study was to describe social participation as described by civil servants and volunteers working with newly arrived immigrants in Sweden.

Method

Design

This study reports on open-ended answers/data regarding civil servants and volunteers' perceptions on social participation among newly arrived immigrants collected with-in a two-round Delphi project (Hagg-Martinell, Eriksson et al. 2020) using a non-probability sampling targeting civil servants and volunteers working within the policy programme "Establishment programme of newly arrived immigrants in Sweden" (Figure I). The civil servants and volunteers will be presented as experts further on in the manuscript.

Figure I. The Delphi Process

Preparation 12 months	Round I 2 months	Administrating 1 month	Round II 3 months
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scoping review conducted. 2. Literature and document study conducted. 3. Gathering of stakeholders contact information in field of survey (n=645). 4. Designing the questionnaire. 5. Pilot test of questionnaire (n=4). 6. Modification of Questionnaire. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 27 item Questionnaire with Likert, checkbox and open-ended questions was distributed online by a non-probability sampling. 2. Reminder I (2 weeks). 3. Reminder II (3 weeks). 4. 201 informants answered the first questionnaire. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data analysis, writing up results for reporting back to panellist. 2. Consensus on items \geq 50% was included for next round. 3. Member generated item included in Questionnaire for round II. 4. Development of the subsequent second round of the online questionnaire. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 17 item Questionnaire with Likert and open-ended questions was distributed by a directed sampling to informants from round I (n=394). 2. Reminder I (1 week). 3. Reminder II (5 weeks) 4. 80 informants answered the second questionnaire.

Setting and sample

Data, consisting of the answers from fifteen open-ended questions from two sequential questionnaire in a two round Delphi-project (Hagg-Martinell, Eriksson et al. 2020), were collected from a total of 238 experts (table 1). Fifty-five percent of the experts had worked with newly arrived immigrants for one to five years and 39% for more than five years; 46 % worked with immigrants in the labour market, 37% worked in language and education, and 17% worked with social activities. Twenty-one percent of the experts had refugee or migration experience.

Table 1. Characteristics of the included experts

	Total
Experience of working with newly arrived immigrants	
Less than 1 year	14
1-5 years	132
More than 5 years	92
Working as civil servant or volunteer in	
Labour market	110
Language and education	89
Social activities	39
Own refugee or migration background	
Yes	51
No	184
Does not want to disclose	3
Gender	
Woman	188
Man	44
Other	1
Does not want to disclose	4
Highest completed education	
Primary school – approx. 9 years	1
High school – 2-3 years	11
Vocational training – up to 3 years	3
University/University College – 3-5 years	220
Postgraduate	2
Does not want to disclose	1

Data collection & Analysis

A qualitative content analysis design as described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) was used to elaborate on fifteen open-ended questions that all described the perceptions of the experts concerning social participation among newly arrived immigrants in this dataset. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004) a qualitative content analysis is a procedure that can uncover manifest content in verbatim material by following a series of steps. This method focused on

identifying differences and similarities in the content of the data.

The first step was to extract answers that all described the perceptions of the experts concerning social participation from other questions. After this step of initial sorting the data the answers in the Excel file were placed into a Word document. In this second step, the data was read several times to get a sense of the whole. In step three, meaning units were identified in line with the purpose of the study. Each meaning unit was given a code, and these were then grouped into preliminary categories. Steps one to three were undertaken by the first author. This first coding was presented to the research group, then discussed and cross-validated by an open process of reasoning with a reflexive discussion that formed a preliminary structure for this initial coding. Meaning units and codes in each main category were read and re-read by the first author to detect differences and similarities forming subcategories. Then, categories were given a final label and grouped into themes (see table 2). In this step of analysis, abstractions were discussed with and validated by the second author. In the results, quotes are presented to reinforce the analytical findings (Sandelowski 1994). Certain linguistic and grammatical revisions were also carried out due to the transition between spoken and written language, and when texts were translated into English (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). An integral part of the last step of analysis was iterative reflexive discussion in two workshops and research meetings within the research group that finalised the content analysis process framing the version of the results presented in this study.

Table 2. Overview of themes, categories, and subcategories

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
Going native in the community	Being a part of the labour market	Employer’s responsibility
		Need for support
		Requirements for job seekers
	Being a part of the civil society	Information about society
		Integration in the society
		Fellow humans as resources
	Contact and collaboration with authorities	Customised activities
		Different authorities
		Insufficient resources
Waiting and processing time		
Being part of everyday life	Individual prerequisites	Physical and physiological health
		Cultural differences
		Sense of connection

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
		Motivation and own responsibility
		External pressure
	Education as a tool	Education among co-workers
		The meaning of the knowledge level
		Planning and arrangement
		The meaning of the language

Ethics

Principles of ethical standards for conducting research on humans as specified in the act concerning the ethical review of research involving humans (SFS 2003) and the GDPR were fully applied. Ethical approval was granted by the ethical review board in Stockholm (2018/871-31/5) and data was gathered between October 2018 and March 2019. The experts were given information on the study by letter, and their consent was assumed if they proceeded to complete the questionnaire. In addition, the expert's participation was voluntary. To ensure confidentiality, information that might reveal experts' identities, such as working place, names, etc. was concealed (WMA 2013).

Findings

Two themes describing social participation emerged during the analysis: Going native in the community and Being part of everyday life. In the results section, newly arrived immigrants will be referred to as new arrivals.

Going native in the community

This theme consists of three different categories: Being a part of the labour market, Being a part of the civil society, and Contact and collaboration with authorities.

Being a part of the labour market

Experts working with new arrivals stated that the Swedish labour market often has high requirements which also apply to the new arrivals. According to the experts the labour market is customised to low-skilled arrivals without higher levels of education. The experts also said that Swedish employers need to see individual competences among the newly arrived immigrants. There is sometimes a lack of

knowledge among the experts concerning the level of Swedish language needed for a job. Furthermore, there is sometimes a lack of understanding and information among Swedish employers, and the employers are often afraid to hire new arrivals. In addition, it is sometimes problematic for co-workers to accept new arrivals as colleagues in the workplace. The experts pointed out that new arrivals need to have their own motivation, internship, and knowledge about the Swedish labour market to become a part of it.

The experts stated that Swedish employers and colleagues need knowledge and information about the need for training for the new arrivals. It is important for them to quickly be given the opportunity to become part of a workplace, as many of them have problems participating in educational programmes. Furthermore, there is also an economic incentive for employers to hire new arrivals.

“Sweden has a system that has made employers accustomed to hiring new arrivals only if there is a subsidy supporting the employment. However, this has led to employers firing the new arrivals just as quickly when the subsidy is removed. The lack of supervision from the employment services makes it possible to utilise the system and to put a new hire in the same position just vacated as the regulations are not being enforced. Both public and civil society use positive language about new arrivals and jobs, but seldom contribute by offering jobs to the target group. Often it is just about keeping people occupied or maintaining a subsidised job for new arrivals”

The experts describe several aspects that can make it easier for new arrivals to become a part of the workplace community. It would be easier for new arrivals to find employment if they were able to get a driving licence and were forced to train and try to speak Swedish at the workplace. There are also aspects which can create obstacles for them becoming involved in the workplace community. For example, problems can arise from a cultural perspective, new arrivals may be bound to cultural or religious requirements that are difficult to implement at a workplace or do not accept having managers from other religions.

Being a part of the civil society

According to the experts there should be a focus on learning Swedish as it promotes integration which makes it easier to become a member of society. The experts said that Sweden citizens seem to think that learning the language is an easy and quick process, and is not affected by shortcomings in the educational and social systems, access to the labour market and lack of support from and access to experts. Furthermore, they said that there is a lack of motivation among many new arrivals



to learn Swedish, since the new immigration law makes it more difficult to get a residence permit. This aspect leads to many of the new arrivals prioritising work and their livelihood. According to the experts, young new arrivals think it is important to learn the new language and they often help each other with translations and learning.

The experts also said that structural discrimination due to ethnical markers such as names and how you dress makes it harder for new arrivals to be accepted. They also described the importance of creating opportunities for people to be able to maintain their roots. Participation in society and social network including Swedish friends were described as other aspects of successful integration.

“We Swedes are bad at talking to people and inviting them in, but when we do it, I think it is good. I think fear and the current political situation, where one refuses to talk or to cooperate, rarely leads to something good. The same conditions apply in the local community. If we invite people in, there are more positive than negative things that it can lead to, clearly”

The experts described the problem of blaming and questioning new arrivals. When the authorities in the community base how they organise their support on the idea that everyone is attempting to cheat the system, the opportunities for an individual to succeed are limited.

Contact and collaboration with authorities

The experts stated that the help needed by new arrivals is significantly greater than what the arrival organisation is designed for. Different organisations working with the new arrivals can cooperate better to create a more engaging situation for them. The greater the need for help the new arrivals have, and the more contacts they have with different organisations, the more problems are created with the establishment.

There is a need for new arrivals to be able to participate in meaningful activities and language courses based on their individual goals. If they are not feeling well, there is a need for them to be able to participate in different activities later. It is difficult to create individual solutions, as the groups of new arrivals are huge. Attending activities and gaining an increased knowledge and understanding of how the Swedish society works can make new arrivals feel more empowered and can increase their awareness of where to find support.

The experts point out that new arrivals often feel very bad mentally and often want to meet their social workers in person. The social services do not have

the capacity or resources for face-to-face meetings and much of the communication is undertaken by phone, which often worries the new arrivals. In their native countries, many are accustomed to dealing with their issues during physical meetings and not by telephone. In addition, language barriers become more apparent on the phone. The experts have some capacity to meet the participants but only a few get the opportunity.

There is a need for experts working with new arrivals to get support from their employers to handle different situations. There are situations where the experts are vulnerable and threatened with violence by new arrivals. There is also a wish from the experts to have previous experience of working with individuals suffering from different problems to those faced by newly arrived immigrants.

According to the experts, a long delay makes it more complicated to take part in language activities since the new arrivals do not wait. Learning Swedish should not take too long, and the language education needs to have clear aims. If a person is illiterate, then there should not be pressure to study at high school level, but there should be an opportunity to learn the Swedish language at a lower level. Language courses are not only a social activity; they have to be based on specific goals, but at the same time adapt to the relevant occupational or educational level.

Housing segregation also has a major impact on opportunities to learn Swedish. If new arrivals live in an area where many speak the same language, they are not forced to use and practice the Swedish language in their everyday life.

Furthermore, it is important that the new arrivals are not placed far from social activities as public transportation can be expensive. There is also a need for them to have a stable housing situation. Many new arrivals live for only two years in one place and then they have to find a new home on their own. It is stressful not knowing where to live and for how long. Some of the new arrivals end up sub-letting or living in residential social housing.

If the family is not present, then the new arrivals are often not willing to seek a job at the right level; instead, they search for all kinds of jobs. Then society loses those who have a higher level of competence, and the new arrivals take the jobs that other low-skilled persons could have taken.

Being part of everyday life

This theme consists of two categories, Individual prerequisites and Education as a tool.

Individual prerequisites

Experts working with the new arrivals point out that it is important for new arrivals to be able to get support from the community when needed. There are situations when only some members of new arriving families get economic support; for example, one family member received a bus ticket and the other family members did not. It is more common that women get isolated compared to men. It is also important to clarify to new arrivals that everybody has to participate in activities organised by the society, irrespective of their previous family situation.

According to the experts there is a need for the health care organisation to observe and understand different cultural attitudes regarding illness and to have the resources to offer different treatments. Furthermore, it is important that new arrivals can receive the right kind of health care and that they search for health care when they need it. According to the experts, the need for health care is greater than health care organisations can handle within a reasonable time. Long waiting times and insufficient information about treatments and support for mental health issues affect the new arrivals.

“Mental health issues are widespread, and resources are limited. For new arrivals, this is an increasing cause of ill-health. In addition to their previous history of escape and trauma, the temporary residence permits, the long wait to even get a residence permit and the very limited possibility of family reunification are contributing factors”

According to the experts it is important that new arrivals receive information on how Swedish society works and why it works in these specific ways. In addition, the new arrivals need information about their rights and obligations. Furthermore, it is important to receive information and knowledge about Swedish norms and culture.

It is important that the new arrivals acquire a sense of coherence in the society as soon as possible. This can create structure and give self-confidence, as well as an experience of personal freedom, independence, and a feeling of empowerment. It is important that the expectations from society are clearly stated and that new arrivals are told why they have to learn a new language. There is also a need to sometimes accept work without relevance to previous experience to become part of the society. At the same time, it is important that the new arrivals are seen for who they are, the knowledge they have, and the ways they could contribute. It is also important that they are doing well and have their family and some friends nearby.

Many of the obstacles that can be seen in encounters with new arrivals are associated with the psychological pressure they are living under, due to the pressure to master the Swedish language and get a job to provide for the family.

Education as a tool

The experts state that new arrivals learn Swedish in different ways, some through traditional forms of schooling such as language courses, some through self-study, and some through their workplace. Language is the key but the ways to learn are different and need different amounts of time depending on the individual.

Short schooling or lack of school background is an obstacle. Non-literate and literate in their home language, high age, not understanding the importance of learning a language could create problems especially if the family can have a different view of a family member's designated role. For example, they may have views that the woman should not work outside the home, or that the newcomer may experience or have a pressure on them not to integrate or not spend time with other people than their compatriots. In some cases, new arrivals have low cognitive abilities. It is sometimes difficult to find adequate educational levels for the individual based on educational background or due to the lack of previous schooling. Furthermore, it can be difficult to find Swedish courses at the right level after living in Sweden for a while. It could also be difficult to understand that they need to learn more.

A long asylum process delays the establishment process and thus also language learning. There is a need for better language teaching and a clearer framework for individuals to understand that it is important to know Swedish and a need to understand their rights and obligations. It is also important for them to understand and to be part of the Swedish social contract.

It is essential to realise that participation in a progressive learning situation is very important. It is also crucial that the authorities take this into account and provide opportunities to secure their livelihood and access to childcare. Apart from taking part in language courses, it is important to provide other activities where the new arrivals can learn and practice Swedish. Examples of such activities can be language café meetings, contact with Swedish inhabitants/citizens/speakers, and jobs where they can practice Swedish. In addition, it is important that they learn how to apply for a job and gain knowledge of the social codes in working life. It is also important to validate previous education from their native country and that they receive education corresponding to earlier education levels.

Discussion

To understand experts point of view of social participation in encounters with newly arrived immigrants for adapting into the society and needs for formal care and support it is necessary for the whole society to address the “bigger picture” of social participation for the new arrivals as a societal effort.

This study shows that it is important to have a feeling of participation in the society. Most Swedish citizens have a network where simple jobs can be found for new arrivals and it is important for the civil society to take up these opportunities. When new arrivals are included in the society, their psychological health gets better, there are fewer experiences of stigmatisation and they receive better language knowledge. Without the presence of family, the feelings of anxiety increase, and they may not take care of their own health. However, the importance of feeling that they can contribute to the society and support themselves is extremely important. Becoming a member of associations or mentorships is more important as it can be difficult to meet new people spontaneously in Sweden, due to a lack of natural meeting places. Previous studies have reported that social participation has positive effects on new arrivals’ health. Social participation such as being an active member in a social environment, and in particular having close relationships plays a key role in physical and mental health and protects against poor psychological health outcomes (Yildirim, Isik et al. 2020; Fiorillo, Lavadera et al. 2017; Webber and Fendt-Newlin 2017).

The findings in this study indicate that cultural differences can be hard to reconcile with arriving in a new country. Opportunities to participate early in different social activities are crucial for the new arrivals. If they can participate on an early basis in, for example, language activities, they can be integrated into the Swedish society faster. According to Niemi et al. (2019) there is a need for policies to enable and support the participation of refugees and asylum seekers in established social organisations and community-organised groups. Furthermore, we found that it is important that new arrivals receive information about the Swedish society and how it works. The Swedish labour market often has high demands on new arrivals. It would be easier for many of them if they were able to obtain low-skilled jobs. It is important that new arrivals gain a sense of being a part of the society as soon as possible. A sense of coherence could be created by participating in meaningful activities and language courses based on their own goals.

The results indicate that several interacting factors contributed to resources that created "going native in the community" and "being part of everyday life" as two overall aspects for social participation for newly arrived immigrants. As such, social participation in this context relates to reasoning and strategies of dealing with uncertainty (Penrod 2007). According to Penrod (2007) living with uncertainty accentuate threats to balance and control in life situations. The experts address that intervention in the EP that facilitates a movement from overwhelming uncertainty to pervasive or minimal uncertainty that is positive for social participation. Penrod's ideas of uncertainty as disruption in the world underpins the importance to avoid distractions or other forms of blocking of being in the world. This exemplifies that strategies and approaches in meeting new arrivals can be used to reinforce and move towards social participation by empowering confidence and minimize uncertainty in the situation.

In line with the focus on social participation as "going native in the community" and "being part of everyday life" preventing new arrivals' lives from being put on hold – with overwhelming uncertainty- could be achieved by not asking them to "wait" in their life situation. Focusing on the here and now by asking questions about life in the local community, being interested in what people do, and providing advice on resources / activities / associations in the local community that anticipates this important outcome of connectedness.

We argue that for professionals working with new arrivals the presented findings can be of importance to enhance social participation in any given situation. The findings show the need to constantly set small goals in everyday life and make new arrivals to focus on resources rather than obstacles. The built-in concrete to "stranger hood", that is to exaggerate the importance of ethnicity, origin, to devote time to time and other places, as well as to base conversations from too abstract goals too far ahead and / or be new arrivals is probably not tolerated to create and promote movement in the new sense of social inclusion. According to Renner et al. (2020) refugees need support to meet their basic needs, as well as to develop participation and personal coping within their social network.

Furthermore, the results in this study shows that issues such as hopelessness, feelings and expectations about the future, and loss of motivation are connected to experts' notions of social support and participation. Preventive interventions addressing risk factors that increase hopelessness among newly arrived immigrants and refugees can from this be understood as an empowering of



confidence. Newman's (1999) ideas about health as an expanding consciousness point out the importance to address meaningful aspect even in if senses of hopelessness barricade a life situation. In this social participation as "going native in the community" and "being part of everyday life" elaborates on this dynamic relation between awareness and health. Being in the world, rather the being held away from is a preventive intervention that constitutes social participation.

This study provides an understanding of what kind of social participation that is addressed by civil servants and volunteers working with newly arrived immigrants. The result is an important fund of knowledge for how to address primary health prevention that might be important for new arrivals. Furthermore, also suggests a range of health service assessments and interventions that might be considered for this group (Neuman 1995; Roy 2009). In addition, experts working with these questions seem to inquire for more knowledge of unhealth and different kind of illnesses in this group. Therefore, health services constitutes an important and pivotal area of knowledge for new arrivals. In addition, nurses play an important role in relieving suffering among work outside the home and groups in society (Holmgren 2017; Wong, Liu et al. 2015; Sullivan-Marx and McCauley 2017).

Strengths and limitations

Given the design of the study, we did not perform any interviews regarding the perceptions of civil servants and volunteers on the social participation of refugees in the fields of the labour market, language education and civic organisations in Sweden. The results are based on experts' written descriptions of their perceptions about social participation. Some of the written descriptions were rather short and this could therefore be a limitation.

To increase trustworthiness and transferability, we have included qualitative data from many different experts. All the authors have long experience both as researchers and as nurses. This pre-understanding and experience of the context allowed the analysis to be performed in more depth. From another perspective, a plausible bias of a researcher with pre-understanding and experience of a studied context may lead to important aspects remaining unnoticed. However, investigator triangulation was applied, and all researchers engaged in the analysis contributed different professional perspectives and experiences to ensure credibility and mitigate the risk of bias (Patton 2015). We studied the experts' perceptions, and the results might be transferable to similar settings.

Conclusions

Civil servants and volunteers connected to and working within the EP for newly arrived immigrants in Sweden pointed out specific contributing resources creating possibilities for social participation. To be able to go native in the community and be a part of everyday life are understood to be crucial aspects of social participation. This first-hand knowledge from experts working with newly arrived immigrants can show a “bigger picture” of the work with social participation also forms the prerequisites for social participation in formal care and health services. The results stress the importance of having a focus on the “here and now” and avoiding measures that “put life on hold”. Working with reachable goals in everyday life that focus on resources rather than obstacles is a point of aspects that generates possibilities promoting social participation in health services and nursing practice.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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