



Bachelor Thesis

**Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden After the 2025 Reform:
How Location Shapes Asylum Seekers' Well-Being
and Integration Outcomes**

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Abstract

Sweden restructured its asylum reception system in 2025, shifting from a model that allowed asylum seekers to arrange their own accommodation towards one that encourages residence in centrally managed facilities operated by the Swedish Migration Agency. This study examines how the location of eleven reception centres operating after the reform affects asylum seekers' well-being and integration outcomes. The analysis combines nine interviews with former residents of reception centres and a descriptive spatial analysis. It identifies public transport, language learning opportunities, and civil society organisations as key resources that influence well-being and integration. Accessibility to these resources partly corresponds to the level of urban centrality of reception centres (urban, suburban, or peripheral). Urban centres generally provide stronger overall access, particularly regarding language learning opportunities and civil society support, while several non-urban centres demonstrate strengths in specific resources. However, in peripheral centres where both mobility and on-site services are limited, asylum seekers often experience social isolation and restricted opportunities for integration. Although based on a small sample, the results reveal an uneven and context-dependent geography of integration support across asylum reception centres in Sweden.

Keywords: *asylum reception centres, spatial accessibility, integration, urban centrality, Sweden*

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Acronyms

ABO	Anläggningsboende (accommodation centres arranged by the Swedish Migration Agency)
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EBO	Eget Boende (privately arranged accommodation)
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

The arrival of asylum seekers in Europe, who are fleeing persecution, violence, and conflict, has remained a pressing and persistent issue over the years (Hallemar & Hejdelind, 2022). This continuous flow raises questions across European countries about how to best receive asylum seekers and ensure their protection (Forte et al. 2025). The reception of asylum seekers is not only a humanitarian response, but where asylum seekers are housed also matters (Hallemar & Hejdelind, 2022). In particular, the physical location of reception centres, the type of accommodation, and the surrounding environment, can significantly affect their access to essential services and opportunities for social interaction (Zill et al. 2020). Spatial organisation therefore plays a crucial role in shaping both the immediate well-being of asylum seekers and their long-term prospects for inclusion in the host society (Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019).

Sweden presents a distinctive case within the European context as it implemented a large reform to its reception system in 2025. Historically, Sweden has been recognised for its relatively generous asylum policies and decentralised housing model, which allowed asylum seekers to arrange their own accommodation (Migrationsverket, 2024). This model offered asylum seekers privacy and autonomy, enabling them to choose locations near relatives or acquaintances and within urban areas (Forssell & Westling, 2024). The 2025 reform, however, cut off the monthly allowance for privately arranged housing, effectively directing asylum seekers toward centralised reception centres (Migrationsverket, 2024). These large facilities, managed by the Swedish Migration Agency in partnership with the state, often involve shared rooms and on-site services such as administration offices (Migrationsverket, 2024).

According to the Swedish Migration Agency, the transition from a decentralised to a centralised model aims to increase control over asylum reception and prevent overcrowding in certain low-economic neighbourhoods (Migrationsverket, 2024). By concentrating residents and administrative services in one location, the centres are said to improve integration of asylum seekers (Migrationsverket, 2024). However, this shift also raises questions about whether the reform functions as a form of migration governance, enabling the state to more closely regulate where asylum seekers live and move (Sack, 1986). This concern is particularly relevant given that asylum seekers are not able to choose the reception centre to

which they are assigned, as placements are determined by the Swedish Migration Agency (Forssell & Westling, 2024). In addition, the reform introduced further control measures, including restrictions preventing asylum seekers from leaving the province in which they reside, thereby limiting their freedom of movement (Sweden Herald, 2026). Finally, weekly check-ins have been implemented to verify that residents are genuinely living in the assigned centres (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

The spatial dimension of reception centres has been the focus of growing research in other European countries. Studies in Denmark, England, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway show that asylum housing is often located on the urban periphery, removed from other neighbourhoods and public services (Kreichauf, 2018; Mierswa, 2016; Pozzo & Evers, 2015; Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019; Smith, 2012). This physical isolation can contribute to social segregation, limit opportunities for language learning and employment, and exacerbate feelings of marginalisation (Diken, 2004; Hauge, Støa, & Denizou, 2017; Kreichauf, 2018; Mierswa, 2016; Parviainen et al. 2020; Pozzo & Evers, 2015; Seethaler-Wari & Yanasmayan, 2023; Smith, 2012). In the initial stages of settlement, these spatial constraints may be particularly significant, as asylum seekers often remain in reception centres in Sweden for extended periods, with an average of 724 days (AIDA, 2025). Geographical marginalisation can thus translate into broader social exclusion, with long-term consequences for integration and inclusion in host societies.

Integration is defined here as the process by which migrants become included and accepted into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). It is a mutual process that requires adaptation from both migrants and the host society (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020).

Despite this growing body of research in Europe, there remains a lack of systematic investigation into the spatial organisation of reception centres in Sweden and its consequences for residents. The 2025 reform makes this an especially timely and relevant issue, as the shift toward centralised accommodation means a greater proportion of asylum seekers will now reside in these centres. This shift raises important questions about how current and future asylum seekers are placed, as placement shapes their initial contact with and impressions of Swedish society. Moreover, by influencing access to services and social networks, it also affects their longer-term integration outcomes. Understanding the spatial dynamics of asylum reception is therefore crucial for evaluating the effectiveness and social impact of Sweden's recent policy changes.

1.2 Aim, Purpose and Research Questions

This study aims to examine whether Sweden's shift from a decentralised to a centralised reception system functions as suggested by the Swedish Migration Agency, namely to improve the integration of asylum seekers, or whether it instead risks exacerbating their social and spatial exclusion. It also examines whether conditions for integration are evenly distributed across reception centres.

To do so, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews with former residents of asylum reception centres with a descriptive spatial analysis. The interviews provides insight into how location influences access to key resources that interviewees identified as crucial for well-being and integration. These findings inform the subsequent spatial analysis, which examines the accessibility of these resources across reception centres with different levels of urban centrality (urban, suburban, or peripheral). In doing so, the study evaluates whether access to these resources is evenly distributed or spatially differentiated across centres.

The two methods together provide an integrated understanding of how the spatial organisation of the current reception system in Sweden shapes conditions for asylum seekers' integration.

Research question: *How does the location of asylum reception centres in Sweden after the 2025 reform affect its residents' well-being and integration outcomes?*

To address this research question, the study is guided by two sub-questions:

- a) How did former residents experience and navigate the location of asylum reception centres, and how did this shape their well-being and opportunities for integration?*
- b) How do asylum reception centres in Sweden vary in their spatial accessibility to integration resources identified as important in asylum seekers' lived experiences?*

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two provides the background, tracing the evolution of the Swedish reception system leading up to the 2025 reform. Chapter three situates the study within the broader European context through a literature review of asylum reception centres, focusing on their spatial distribution and implications for residents. Chapter four develops the theoretical framework by introducing theories of integration, spatial governance, and space. Chapter five outlines the research design, combining semi-structured interviews with descriptive spatial analysis. Chapter six presents the findings by first examining former residents' lived experiences and the resources they identify as most important for well-being and integration. It subsequently analyses the spatial accessibility of integration resources across reception centres according to levels of urban centrality. Chapter seven discusses the findings in relation to the literature and theory. Chapter eight concludes the study with key insights and policy recommendations.

Delimitations

This study is subject to several delimitations. First, it focuses exclusively on the eleven reception centres currently operated by the Swedish Migration Agency following the 2025 reform. While studying accommodation used *prior* to the reform, particularly those established after the 2015 refugee crisis, could provide valuable historical comparison, the aim here is to examine the current system and how the location of centres shapes newly arrived asylum seekers' opportunities for integration.

Second, the study does not include asylum seekers residing in self-arranged housing (EBO). Examining this group could provide additional insight into how location affects integration when asylum seekers are able to choose where they live, particularly among those who continue living in such arrangements despite the reduced financial support introduced after the 2025 reform. However, this falls beyond the scope of the present analysis.

Finally, although integration is conceptualised as a multidimensional process, the analysis emphasises spatial and institutional factors, particularly access to services, mobility, and social interaction. It does not provide a comprehensive assessment of other dimensions that influence integration, such as economic opportunities.

Key Concepts

“Asylum seekers” are individuals who are seeking international protection (UNHCR, 2026). Their claims for refugee status or complementary protection have not yet been decided, or they may still be in the process of formally applying for asylum (UNHCR, 2026).

“Reception of asylum seekers” means the type of assistance, socially and economically, given to persons during the period their asylum application is being processed (Abraha, 2007). According to the Geneva Convention, the European Union’s Reception Directive and the Swedish reception system, asylum seekers are entitled to right of housing, financial assistance and healthcare during the asylum process (Abraha, 2007).

“Asylum accommodation centres” are defined as temporary, state-funded housing provided by the Swedish Migration Agency for individuals awaiting a decision on their asylum application (AIDA, 2025). Under the Swedish reception system, new asylum seekers are generally required to reside in these assigned facilities in order to access financial support, such as the daily allowance (Migrationsverket, 2024). Accommodation typically consists of shared flats, where single adults are placed in same-sex shared rooms, while families are usually allocated a private room (Migrationsverket, 2024).

In migration studies, “integration” is understood as a long-term and reciprocal process involving both migrants and the host society, rather than a one-sided, linear assimilation (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020). It refers to the process through which migrants become included and accepted into the core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). In this thesis, integration is conceptualised as a multidimensional process consisting of four dimensions: structural, cultural, social, and identificatory (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006).

2. Background

Context of Asylum in Europe and Sweden

Over the past decade, Europe has been a major destination for asylum seekers, largely driven by political instability and armed conflicts in regions such as the Middle East and Northern Africa (Forte et al. 2025). The number of asylum applications increased steadily and peaked in 2015-2016, when more than 2.5 million people sought asylum in European Union (EU) member states (Forte et al. 2025). This influx placed unprecedented pressure on national reception systems and exposed differences in how countries managed asylum seekers (Forte et al. 2025).

To harmonise asylum policy among member states, the EU developed the Common European Asylum Policy (CEAP). The CEAP establishes minimum standards for the treatment of asylum seekers while leaving much room for individual states to make their own decisions (EU, 2003). One key component of the CEAP is the Reception Conditions Directive, which requires member states to guarantee basic reception conditions, including accommodation, food, financial support, healthcare, education, and access to employment (EU, 2013). While these provisions have clear geographical implications, the directive does not explicitly address how or where reception facilities should be located within countries (Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019). As a result, the organisation and location of reception systems vary significantly across Europe.

Within this broader European context, Sweden has historically maintained a particularly generous asylum policy. During the 2015 refugee crisis, Sweden received approximately 163,000 asylum applications, the second-highest number in Europe after Germany (Migrationsverket, 2025a). The large influx led to the rapid establishment of temporary accommodation solutions across the country, placing considerable strain on existing reception systems (Migrationsverket, 2025a). In the years following the crisis, Sweden gradually introduced stricter immigration policies, which contributed to a significant decline in asylum applications. In recent years, the number of applications has stabilised at approximately 10,000 per year (Migrationsverket, 2025b). Sweden's experience illustrates the challenges of balancing humanitarian obligations, housing capacity and long-term integration within national asylum systems.

Historical Swedish Reception System

The reception of asylum seekers in Sweden is primarily governed by the Act (1994:137) on the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others (*Lagen om mottagande av asylsökande och andra*). Under this legislation, the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) is responsible for providing accommodation and support services. An exception exists for unaccompanied minors, for whom municipalities are responsible for providing guardians, accommodation, schooling, and other social support (Migrationsverket, 2024).

Since the 1990s, asylum seekers in Sweden have had two main housing options. The first is *centralised accommodation* (*Anläggningsboende, ABO*), in which the Migration Agency assigns asylum seekers to specific reception centres. These centres typically consist of shared facilities, with individuals often sharing rooms with the same sex, and with separate rooms for families (Migrationsverket, 2024). Administrative offices are often located nearby to facilitate case procession and service provision (Migrationsverket, 2024). Importantly, reception facilities are rarely purpose-built. Instead, they are typically located in repurposed buildings such as hotels, sanatoriums, or hospitals, reflecting the system's reliance on available properties rather than long-term spatial planning (Hallemar & Hejdelind, 2022). Residents may be required to relocate between centres while awaiting a decision, and the placement decisions cannot be appealed (Migrationsverket, 2024). While this system enables administrative oversight and service provision, it limits asylum seekers' autonomy in choosing where to live.

The second option is *self-arranged housing* (*Eget Boende, EBO*), which allows asylum seekers to independently choose their place of residence within Sweden. Many asylum seekers opt for this option because it allows them to live with relatives or acquaintances, often in urban areas that offer better access to employment, education, and social networks (Hallemar & Hejdelind, 2022). The EBO system was introduced in the 1990s to increase personal responsibility and integration opportunities (Forssell & Westling, 2024). This system has become very popular: between 2020 and 2024, approximately 60-65% of asylum seekers opted for EBO (Forssell & Westling, 2024, p.17). Residents of both ABO and EBO arrangements received financial support from the state during the asylum process, which often represented their only source of income (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

Negative Consequences of Private Accommodation

Although the EBO system provided asylum seekers with greater autonomy and flexibility, the Swedish government stated that it also generated several challenges for both asylum seekers and society (Forssell & Westling, 2024). Many asylum seekers settled in neighbourhoods with lower housing costs, which were often classified as socioeconomically vulnerable (Migrationsverket, 2024). This concentration contributed to spatial segregation, overcrowding, and social exclusion (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

In some cases, the concentration of asylum seekers placed additional pressure on neighbourhoods already facing social and economic challenges, such as unemployment and exclusion, potentially hindering the completion of school, finding work, and constituting a breeding ground for crime (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

From an administrative perspective, the EBO system also complicated the management of asylum applications and the delivery of essential services. Limited knowledge of asylum seekers' residential addresses made it difficult for the Migration Agency and municipalities to reach individuals with critical information, such as invitations to health examinations, social introductions, or schooling for children, which are legally mandatory (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

These negative consequences revealed an inherent tension within the EBO system: while it promoted personal responsibility and a sense of empowerment among asylum seekers, it also created spatial and administrative difficulties that complicated integration efforts and public service delivery.

2025 Reform - Centralised Reception System

In response to these challenges, Sweden implemented a major reform to its asylum reception system on 1 March 2025. The reform was partly influenced by broader developments in European migration governance, including the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Its newly introduced rules on screening procedures, border procedures, and reception conditions required countries to adjust their reception systems accordingly (Migrationsverket, 2025d).

The reform significantly increased the role of state-operated reception centres by removing financial support for those living in private housing (Migrationsverket, 2024). As a result,

asylum seekers are now strongly incentivised to reside in designated reception facilities managed by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket, 2024).

Two main types of centres are currently being operated:

- Arrival centres, which focus on the initial registration and processing of asylum claims
- Return centres, intended to facilitate the management of rejected asylum claims

According to the Swedish Migration Agency, the reform aims “to create an orderly reception that promotes more effective arrival and return processes,” with practical objectives including shorter processing times, improved oversight, and reduced spatial segregation associated with the EBO system (Migrationsverket, 2024, p.15; Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Under the new system, asylum seekers assigned to a centre must attend regular check-ins, and the Migration Agency has the authority to verify residency compliance through inspections if necessary (Forssell & Westling, 2024). Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to withdrawal of financial support, and in severe cases, to the termination of the asylum application (Migrationsverket, 2024). Assignments to centres are determined by case-specific factors, such as the presence of children or special needs, rather than individual preference (Forssell & Westling, 2024). While the asylum reception centres are open and residents may leave voluntarily, the reform limits their ability to move outside the province where their assigned centre is located (Sweden Herald, 2026).

Overall, the reform reflects a deliberate policy shift from individual autonomy and decentralised housing towards centralised accommodation and structured oversight.

Critiques to the Reform

Despite the intended benefits of the 2025 reform, several municipalities and organisations have raised criticisms regarding its potential impact on asylum seekers’ well-being and integration. Some local governments argue that prioritising state-operated accommodation should not be the primary goal of the reception system. For example, Östergötland Municipality emphasises that self-arranged housing can strengthen integrity, empowerment and well-being (Forssell & Westling, 2024). Similarly, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten concluded that private accommodation had not led to a high degree of social exclusion or segregation in their region (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also expressed their concerns. The National Council of Refugee Groups (FARR) highlighted that the negative conditions of state-operated centres, such as overcrowding or social vulnerability, have not been sufficiently studied, while the Institute for Human Rights emphasised that the reform may restrict freedom of movement, family life, and the right to adequate housing, potentially violating the principle of a fair balance between individual rights and state interests (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

These critiques underscore a tension at the core of the reform: while centralised reception aims to improve administrative efficiency and reduce segregation, it may simultaneously limit asylum seekers' autonomy, well-being, and opportunities for integration. The perspectives of municipalities and NGOs therefore highlight the importance of considering local contexts, human rights implications, and the lived experiences of asylum seekers when designing and implementing reception policies.

Current Operational Centres

Following the 2025 reform, Sweden currently operates eleven centralised reception centres spread across the municipalities of Boden, Burlöv, Flen, Halmstad, Härnösand, Malmö, Mölndal, Sigtuna, Stockholm, Vänersborg and Västerås. Together, these centres provide approximately 5,400 accommodation places, of which about 2,100 are currently occupied (Sweden Herald, 2026).

However, the Swedish Migration Agency estimates that the reception system requires capacity for approximately 11,000 places, meaning that additional facilities are still needed (Migrationsverket, 2025a). As a result, the agency continues to search for new locations to expand the reception system (Migrationsverket, 2025c). When identifying locations for new reception centres, the Swedish Migration Agency conducts consultations with municipalities and other authorities regarding both the location and design of facilities (Migrationsverket, 2025d). Policy guidelines for the establishment of reception centres state that facilities should avoid locations in or near socioeconomically vulnerable areas identified by the Swedish Police Authority (Migrationsverket, 2025d). Despite these guidelines, some existing reception facilities are located near areas classified as socioeconomically vulnerable. For example, the centre in Malmö is located close to the Rosengård district, while the facility in Sigtuna is situated near Valsta (Migrationsverket, 2025d). The Migration Agency notes that relocating existing facilities would be difficult due to financial and logistical constraints.

The current distribution of centres reflects administrative priorities. Several centres, including those in Boden, Burlöv, Malmö, Mölndal, Sigtuna and Stockholm were selected because of their proximity to Migration Agency service offices where asylum applications are processed (Migrationsverket, 2025c). However, because the number of available facilities near these offices is limited, additional centres have been established in municipalities such as Flen, Halmstad, Härnösand, Vänersborg and Västerås (Bäckman Lägerdal, 2025; Migrationsverket, 2025c).

Relevance to Thesis

The transition from a decentralised to a more centralised system in Sweden raises critical questions about how the spatial distribution affects the well-being and integration of asylum seekers. Several consultation bodies involved in the reform process, including the Swedish Bar Association, have stressed the need for systematic analyses to identify suitable locations for reception centres (Forssell & Westling, 2024).

Despite these concerns, a significant gap remains in both research and policy discussions. Although the reform increasingly centralises reception accommodation, there is limited understanding of how the spatial organisation of reception centres influences asylum seekers' well-being, access to resources, and integration opportunities. This thesis seeks to address this gap by examining asylum seekers' lived experiences in Sweden in relation to these factors, alongside an analysis of the spatial distribution of reception centres.

3. Literature Review

Spatial Organisation of Asylum Reception in Europe

A small but growing number of European studies have examined the spatial organisation of asylum reception centres. These studies consistently find that accommodation is often located in peripheral urban areas or rural settings (Kreichauf, 2018; Mierswa, 2016; Seethaler-Wari & Yanasmayan, 2023; Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019; Zill et al. 2020). Such placement restricts access to services, employment, education, and informal interactions with the local population. Seethaler-Wari and Yanasmayan (2023) emphasise that location itself becomes a barrier to normalised lifestyles. Distance from urban society reduces everyday encounters, reinforcing isolation. Thus, even when asylum seekers are physically present within a country, they may remain socially excluded from the host society (Smith, 2012).

The Swedish Asylum Reception System

To date, only one study has specifically examined the spatial organisation of the Swedish asylum reception system. Focussing primarily on temporary accommodation established by municipalities following the Ukraine crisis, Hallemar and Hejdelind (2022) characterise asylum reception in Sweden as an “ingenmansland” (‘no mans land’): a fragmented, temporary, and semi-isolated space operating parallel to mainstream society. They show that reception facilities are rarely purpose-built. Instead, they are often repurposed buildings such as hotels, hospitals, or apartment complexes. This reflects a system in which the Swedish Migration Agency relies heavily on short-term leases in the private market, prioritising administrative flexibility over long-term spatial planning. As a result, accommodation is often located wherever suitable buildings are available, rather than in areas that would support meaningful social integration.

However, while this study offers an important conceptualisation of Swedish reception spaces, its empirical scope remains limited. Rather than focusing on the reception centres managed by the Swedish Migration Agency, it primarily focuses on temporary accommodation that were organised by municipalities after the Ukraine crisis. Moreover, it does not delve into the lived experiences of asylum seekers residing in these centres through interviews. As such, it leaves open questions about how spatial placement within the current reception system shapes residents’ everyday experiences.

Rationales Behind Peripheral Placement

There are several ways in which authorities justify the peripheral placement of asylum reception centres. The first two are economic and logistical rationales. Governments often justify locating centres in less central areas in terms of lower costs or available housing (Diken, 2004; Forssell & Westling, 2024; Hallemar & Hejdelind, 2022).

However, research also points to political and social rationales. By situating accommodation in remote areas, authorities contribute to a symbolic geography that positions asylum seekers as marginal to society (Smith, 2012). To illustrate, Smith (2012) argues that Ireland's reception system deliberately dispersed asylum seekers across peripheral locations as a way of managing their visibility. In this sense, the location of reception centres not only reflects but also actively shapes social relations, influencing perceptions of who belongs 'inside' or 'outside' of society, affecting identities and interactions (Kreichauf, 2018).

Residents often interpret their placement as an indication that they are unwelcome, while locals may view them as foreign (Hauge, Støa & Denizou, 2017). This limits opportunities for asylum seekers to be recognised as "ordinary people driven by ordinary desires" (Kohli, 2006, p.708). In this way, these dynamics contribute to processes of "othering," where individuals or groups are constructed as different from and inferior to the dominant social group (Seethaler-Wari & Yanasmayan, 2023). Ultimately, peripheral placement may also function as a deterrent to future migration by communicating a transnational message of non-welcome to potential migrants (Conlon, Hiemstra & Mountz, 2017).

Lived Experiences of Spatial Conditions

However, economic, logistical, and political explanations do not always capture how asylum seekers themselves experience these conditions, or whether they perceive them as reflecting their lived realities. Nevertheless, empirical studies show that spatial conditions have significant implications for well-being. Remote placement has been linked to feelings of exclusion, hopelessness, and a sense of being "unwanted" (Mierswa, 2016; Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019). Additionally, limited access to everyday urban life can reactivate traumatic memories associated with confinement or displacement (Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019).

For families, the consequences of peripherally located centres may be especially severe. Parviainen et al. (2022) find that parents in remote accommodation often stay inside due to limited social networks and a lack of information about available activities. This immobility

negatively affects parental mental health and children's development. For asylum-seeking families from collectivist cultures in particular, relocation to isolated environments can intensify the sense of cultural dislocation (Parviainen et al. 2022).

In contrast, studies examining housing located in more urban areas report more positive outcomes. Accommodation placed within existing residential neighbourhoods, even if it is not in city centres, provides opportunities for natural encounters and support (Hauge, Støa & Denizou, 2017). Asylum seekers living closer to amenities feel more part of society (Simonsen & Skjulhaug, 2019). Seethaler-Wari and Yanasmayan (2023) show that centres located in residential areas in Germany attracted local volunteers and fostered bridge-building activities, whereas those in isolated industrial zones remained disconnected from local social networks. Hauge, Støa and Denizou (2017) also find that individual urban housing enhances independence and agency, with asylum seekers being more active users of urban amenities.

Socio-spatial Justice

From a social justice perspective, this spatial separation challenges the principle that all residents should have equal opportunities for well-being (Hauge, Støa & Denizou, 2017). Given that many asylum seekers in Sweden become long-term residents, their placement in marginal areas raises concerns about long-term integration and equality. Diken (2004) argues that refugees often occupy a “zone of indistinction,” where rights are weakened. If equality is a core societal value, it must be reflected in spatial policy.

Despite the relevance of geography, Simonsen and Skjulhaug (2019) note that planning documents rarely acknowledge or problematise location as significant for socio-spatial equality. Instead, public debates often focus on local communities' reactions to new centres rather than on how location affects asylum seekers.

Research Gap and Contribution

Taken together, existing research demonstrates both the rationales behind the placement of reception centres and their effects on asylum seekers' sense of belonging and opportunities. However, several important gaps remain. First, although many studies agree that asylum reception centres are often located in peripheral areas, peripherality is frequently treated as inherently exclusionary, leaving limited room for variation in lived experiences across

different spatial and social contexts. In addition, less attention has been paid to how individuals actively navigate and respond to these spatial constraints in everyday life. Most importantly, there is a lack of research focusing specifically on Sweden, despite its comparatively extensive and rapidly restructured reception system following recent policy reforms, making it a particularly relevant case for understanding how spatial organisation shapes integration processes.

This study addresses these gaps by combining qualitative interviews with former residents of reception centres in Sweden and a descriptive spatial analysis of accessibility to key integration resources. By linking lived experiences with spatial patterns, the study contributes to new empirical insight into the Swedish case and integrates spatial patterns, lived experience, and coping mechanisms in a way that is largely missing in the existing literature. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the spatial organisation of the asylum reception system influences integration outcomes in a country that presents itself as committed to equality.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework brings together three complementary perspectives. First, integration theory distinguishes between different dimensions of integration. Second, spatial governance theory explains how the placement of asylum reception centres can result from deliberate state practices and migration management. Finally, space theory is used to understand asylum reception centres not as neutral settings, but as spaces continuously shaped by the people who reside in and interact with them.

4.1 Integration Theory

In human geography, integration is understood as a long-term and multi-generational process through which migrants become part of the receiving society (de Haas, Castles and Miller, 2020). Rather than one-way assimilation, integration is a mutual process of adaptation between immigrants and the host society that must be actively supported by the state (Council of European Union, 2004). Ultimately, successful integration implies that migrants are recognised as full members of society, with equal access to economic, legal, cultural, and social spheres (Heckmann, 1999). Integration is grounded in the protection of human rights and the principles of respect, tolerance, and non-discrimination, ensuring that everyone is treated equally and with dignity (International Organisation of Migration, 2026).

Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) conceptualise integration as a multidimensional process comprising four interrelated dimensions: structural, cultural, social, and identificatory.

1. The **structural dimension** refers to the acquisition of rights and access to key institutions in the host society: economy, education, housing, welfare state (including health) and political citizenship. It captures the extent to which migrants are able to participate in socioeconomic and political life under conditions comparable to those of the native-born population. Limitations in legal status or labour market access can restrict such participation and create broader challenges for social inclusion.
2. The **cultural dimension** relates to an individual's cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal change. Cultural integration (or acculturation) involves mutual adaptation, as it also changes the host society which must learn new ways of relating to immigrants and adapting to their needs. Immigrants are not required to abandon the language and culture of their country of origin. Instead, the development of

bilingualism and biculturalism is often associated with greater social mobility and fuller participation in the receiving society.

3. The **social dimension** concerns migrants' interpersonal relationships and participation in social networks. It focuses on the extent to which individuals establish connections beyond their immediate ethnic or national group, including interactions with members of the wider society. Key elements of cultural integration, particularly language acquisition, serve as important preconditions for social integration, as they enable communication and facilitate the formation of broader social ties.
4. Finally, the **identificatory dimension** refers to migrants' feeling of belonging and identification with the host society. It captures how individuals perceive their place within the national community and the extent to which they see themselves as part of it. This dimension is often regarded as emerging once other dimensions of integration have progressed, as it tends to develop through sustained participation and acceptance within the receiving society.

In this study, these four dimensions are used as analytical tools to examine how spatial and institutional conditions shape asylum seekers' opportunities for integration.

4.2 Spatial Governance Theory

Spatial governance theory helps explain why asylum reception centres are located in particular places. This theory posits that space is not neutral but socially produced through power relations and ideology (Lefebvre, 1991). The state organises space in distinct ways to regulate and manage populations and their access to resources (Sack, 1986). From this perspective, asylum reception centres are embedded within broader socio-spatial power structures. Their locations reflect logistical concerns as well as political priorities and migration governance strategies.

In Sweden, the Swedish Migration Agency's use of centralised accommodation means that asylum seekers have little choice over where they live, and their movement and access to urban resources are shaped by the location of these centres. Although reception centres may appear to provide assistance and shelter, they also function as spaces of containment (Kreichauf, 2018). According to Kreichauf (2018), such facilities force and concentrate refugees in extraterritorial spaces, effectively separating them and creating a distinction between those inside (asylum seekers) and those outside (the local population).

The placement of centres in peripheral areas may also carry symbolic meaning. Because these areas are often perceived as spaces for those excluded from society, the location of reception centres can reinforce stigma and shape negative perceptions of asylum seekers based on where they live (Wacquant, 2007). Recognising these dynamics, this study does not treat asylum seekers as passive recipients of spatial arrangements. Instead, the methodological approach includes interviews to capture how residents navigate, resist, or adapt to these spatial constraints, thereby highlighting their agency.

Scholars further argue that centralised accommodation may serve broader governance purposes. First, restrictive living conditions may act as a deterrent by discouraging future asylum seekers (Szczepanikova, 2013). Second, centralised accommodation enables authorities to exercise greater control over asylum seekers' daily lives. While living in privately arranged housing allows asylum seekers to take responsibility for their own affairs and seek support from their communities (Migrationsverket, 2024; Conlon, Hiemstra & Mountz, 2017), reception centres can increase asylum seekers' dependency on assistance from authorities. By concentrating asylum seekers in designated facilities, these arrangements foster the perception that their problems must be identified and solved by those in power rather than by the individuals themselves (Szczepanikova, 2013). In this sense, the centres signal that the authorities are in control of their future prospects, not the asylum seekers themselves (Szczepanikova, 2013).

The confinement of asylum seekers to specific areas is also linked to broader policy developments, including stricter immigration laws and the increasing dominance of neoliberalism in governance (Conlon, Hiemstra & Mountz, 2017; Kreichauf, 2018; Muster & Ostendorf, 1998). This suggests that the spatial distribution of reception centres must be analysed within its wider political context. Zill et al. (2020) further emphasise that additional actors, such as regional actors and non-state actors, can influence the functioning of reception centres, resulting in variation between centres within a national context.

This thesis applies spatial governance theory to examine how the location of asylum reception centres shapes asylum seekers' access to resources, sense of belonging, and personal autonomy. It assesses whether the Swedish reception system can be understood as a form of spatial governance in practice by linking lived experiences to spatial arrangements.

4.3 Space Theory

Space is not simply a fixed geographical container which people fill up and move around in. Instead, space is socially produced through human activities, relations, and meanings (Lefebvre, 1991). According to Henri Lefebvre (1991), spaces are continuously shaped and reshaped both over time and through the ways in which people perceive and experience them. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) introduced a conceptual triad to explain how space is produced through three dimensions:

1. **Perceived space** refers to the physical organisation of space and the everyday activities that take place within it. It focuses on how space is materially structured and used in daily life.
2. **Conceived space** refers to how space is imagined, designed, and organised by the state, planners, and architects. This dimension focuses on how authorities conceptualise space and the rationales that guide spatial planning.
3. **Lived space** refers to how individuals experience and interpret the space they interact with. This dimension highlights the symbolic, emotional, and personal meaning that people attach to places.

This study draws on Lefebvre's spatial triad to analyse the placement of asylum reception centres and their role in affecting asylum seekers' well-being and integration journeys. Conceived space is examined in the Background (chapter 2) through policy documents from the Swedish Migration Agency in order to understand the institutional rationales guiding the organisation and placement of asylum reception centres.

Lived space is explored through interviews with asylum seekers, which allows for understanding of how reception centres are experienced and interpreted in everyday life. This approach makes it possible to analyse reception centres not only as planned locations or physical infrastructures, but as lived environments shaped by personal experiences, meanings, and emotions of their residents.

Perceived space is analysed through a descriptive spatial accessibility analysis of reception centres, which systematically measures their proximity to key integration resources. This approach captures the material spatial conditions that shape opportunities for movement, participation, and access to essential services.

5. Methodology

This study adopted a two-phase mixed-methods approach using an exploratory sequential design. It began with qualitative semi-structured interviews with former residents of asylum reception centres. Themes identified in the interviews as important informed the subsequent descriptive spatial analysis by guiding the selection of services included in the spatial accessibility analysis. Combining qualitative insights with spatial analysis enabled a comparative assessment of how accessible integration resources are across asylum reception centres, focusing on those resources that asylum seekers consider important.

5.1 Phase 1: Semi-structured Interviews

The first phase explored the lived experiences of former residents of asylum reception centres, guided by sub-question (a): *How did former residents experience and navigate the location of asylum reception centres, and how did this shape their well-being and opportunities for integration?*

Former residents were chosen because they can reflect on the entire duration of their stay and its long-term effects on integration. Interviewing current residents may present ethical risks due to legal and personal vulnerabilities, whereas former residents are generally in more stable circumstances.

Participant recruitment was conducted through Interkultur, a non-profit organisation supporting the establishment of immigrants in Lund, using a snowball sampling technique. Initial contacts were established via the researcher's internship colleagues, and subsequent participants were recruited through referrals. Efforts were made to include participants with varied profiles and who had resided in different asylum reception centres, allowing comparative insights.

Nine interviews were conducted in total. They took place either digitally via Microsoft Teams or in person in cafés, a park, and the city hall. Interview lengths varied from 20 to 75 minutes, depending on how much information participants were able to elaborate on. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and English, and in Turkish with the assistance of an interpreter. An overview of participant characteristics is provided in Appendix A.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen because it allows focus on questions related to access to services, daily routines, and integration, while also enabling participants to introduce topics they consider important. The interview guide (see Appendix B) included questions such as:

- Daily routines and frequency of accessing city services and activities.
- Experiences of social interaction and inclusion within the local community.
- Strategies for navigating Swedish society, highlighting participants' agency.
- Reflections on how early experiences in asylum reception centres influenced long-term integration outcomes.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. The interviews were transcribed and coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being predetermined. Through iterative reading of the transcripts, recurring patterns relating to spatial arrangements, accessibility, well-being, and integration were identified. These were subsequently grouped into broader analytical themes, which informed the interpretation of the descriptive spatial analysis by linking participants' subjective experiences with measurable spatial characteristics.

5.2 Phase 2: Descriptive Spatial Analysis

The descriptive spatial analysis was guided by sub-question (b): *How do asylum reception centres in Sweden vary in their spatial accessibility to integration resources identified as important in asylum seekers' lived experiences?*

This second phase of the research analysis translated the themes identified in the interviews as important for well-being and integration into measurable spatial accessibility indicators. First, each reception centre was classified according to its level of urban centrality. By combining urban centrality with the spatial accessibility indicators, this analysis examined whether access to integration resources was consistent across reception centres, or whether it varied depending on their position within the urban hierarchy.

This analysis did not aim to model accessibility using advanced spatial or network methods. Instead, it developed a transparent and comparative approach to assess spatial accessibility across different locations.

Classification of Reception Centres by Urban Centrality

The spatial analysis focused on eleven asylum reception centres in Sweden that remained operational following the 2025 reform. The location is expected to influence access to integration resources, as centres in or near major urban areas typically have better access to transport and services.

To systematically capture these differences, the centres were categorised by level of urban centrality, allowing comparison beyond individual site characteristics toward broader spatial patterns of accessibility. Centres were therefore manually categorised as urban, suburban, or peripheral based on their position within Sweden's settlement hierarchy and their integration into transport and service networks.

A classification tailored to the Swedish context was developed by combining the author's categorisation with the urban–fringe–periphery framework of Standfuß et al. (2023):

- **Urban centres** are located within Sweden's metropolitan regions: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. These areas correspond to the *urban core* category and are characterised by high population density, compact and continuous built-up form, dense transport networks, and extensive service provision.
- **Suburban centres** are medium-sized cities or cities located within the commuting zones of metropolitan areas. They correspond to the *urban fringe* category, representing transitional areas with moderate service density and functional links to urban cores.
- **Peripheral centres** include smaller towns located outside major commuting zones. They align with the *urban periphery* category and are characterised by lower population density, longer travel distances, and limited integration into national transport and service networks. These areas often consist of smaller settlements separated by non-built land uses such as agriculture or forest.

Based on this classification, a map was created to visualise the spatial distribution of reception centres across Sweden and differences in their urban centrality. The mapping was conducted in QGIS using OpenStreetMap as a base layer and the WGS84 coordinate reference system (EPSG:4326). Reception centres were plotted as point locations and symbolised using a colour scheme (red, orange, and blue) representing urban, suburban, and peripheral categories respectively.

Operationalisation of Spatial Accessibility of Integration Resources

This section outlines how spatial accessibility of integration resources identified as important in the interviews was operationalised. These resources include public transport accessibility, language learning accessibility, and civil society organisation (CSO) accessibility. To enable comparison across reception centres, each resource was broken down into a set of indicators capturing key dimensions of accessibility, including distance, travel time, service availability, and service intensity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Operationalisation of Spatial Accessibility of Integration Resources

Integration Resource	Indicators
Public Transport Accessibility	1. Distance to the nearest bus stop 2. Frequency of public transport services 3. Travel time to the nearest urban centre (operationalised as the central station) 4. Travel costs (one-way ticket)
Language Learning Accessibility	1. Number of language cafés and/or schools within a 30-minute travel time 2. Distance to the nearest language learning opportunity
Civil Society Accessibility	1. Number of CSOs within 30-minute travel time 2. Travel time to the nearest CSO 3. Number of CSO organisations operating on-site at reception centres 4. Frequency of on-site CSO activities

For public transport accessibility, indicators include distance to the nearest bus stop as a measure of physical proximity to public transport infrastructure. In addition, service frequency towards the nearest urban centre (operationalised as the central station) and travel time to that centre were included to capture connectivity. Travel cost was also included, as interviewees identified it as a barrier to mobility. Some interviewees also highlighted knowledge and digital barriers as restricting their mobility. However, these factors were not included, as they are individual-level constraints that cannot be reliably operationalised as spatial indicators.

Language learning accessibility was measured through the number of language cafés and schools within a 30-minute travel time by public transport, as well as the distance to the nearest opportunity. This captures both local availability and broader accessibility within a realistic daily travel range. A 30-minute threshold was used as a pragmatic estimate of

acceptable travel time for routine access to services, particularly for populations with limited access to private transport.

Civil society accessibility includes both external CSOs and on-site activities. It captures the number of CSOs accessible within a 30-minute travel time, distance to the nearest CSO, the presence of CSOs operating on-site at reception centres, and the frequency of their visits.

To enable comparison across heterogeneous indicators, all variables were standardised into ordinal categories (scores 1-3). This was done by applying predefined threshold values for each indicator, converting raw values (e.g. distance, travel time, frequency, and costs) into comparable scores. These scores represent low, moderate, and high accessibility. This step introduces a deliberate level of abstraction, prioritising comparability on a shared scale over metric precision. Table 2 presents the thresholds used for the public transport accessibility indicators, while thresholds for the remaining resources are provided in Appendix C.

Table 2. Classification Thresholds for Public Transport Accessibility Indicators

	Indicator	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
1.	Distance to bus stop	>500 m	100-500 m	<100 m
2.	Frequency	≥ 30 min	15-30 min	≤ 15 min
3.	Travel time	>30 min	15-30 min	<15 min
4.	Cost (SEK)	≥ 40	33-39	≤ 32

Subsequently, the final index score was constructed for each integration resource by summing the ordinal scores of all indicators:

$$\text{Final index score} = \text{score of indicator 1} + \text{score of indicator 2} + \text{score of indicator 3} + \text{score of indicator 4}$$

Each indicator was assigned equal weight, meaning that all indicators contributed equally to the final index score. Although some indicators may influence accessibility more strongly than others (for example, travel time may have a greater impact on mobility than proximity to a bus stop), equal weighting was applied as a simplifying and normatively neutral assumption consistent with the exploratory design of the study. This approach was also pragmatic, as there was no clear empirical or theoretical basis for assigning differential weights.

The final index scores are categorised into three levels of accessibility based on the total score range. Since each indicator is scored from 1 to 3, the total score ranges from 4 to 12 and is

divided into three equal intervals: low (4–6), moderate (7–9), and high (10–12). In practice, “low” reflects limited access, “moderate” partial or mixed access, and “high” strong and consistent access across indicators. The public transport categorisation is shown in Table 3, while thresholds for the remaining resources are provided in Appendix D.

Table 3. Categorisation of Public Transport Accessibility Scores

Total score	Category
4-6	Low accessibility
7-9	Moderate accessibility
10-12	High accessibility

Finally, a summary table was created showing each centre’s level of urban centrality alongside its accessibility levels for each resource. This enabled a combined assessment of integration resource accessibility and facilitated comparison across reception centres with different degrees of urban integration.

Data sources

Data sources included publicly available address data for reception centres. Transport data were obtained from regional public transport providers, including Din Tur, Hallandstrafik, Länstrafiken Norrbotten, Nya VL, Skånetrafiken, Sörmlandstrafiken, Storstockholms Lokaltrafik, and Västtrafik. Data on language learning opportunities and civil society organisations were collected from websites and social media platforms of municipalities, libraries, CSOs, faith-based organisations, universities, and education providers.

5.3 Scope and Limitations

Limitations of Semi-structured Interviews

Several limitations in the interview data shaped the scope of this study. First, the small number of interviews restricted the generalisability of the findings. Accordingly, the aim of the research is to generate analytical insight rather than statistical representation. Nevertheless, the spatial analysis partially compensated for this limitation by identifying broader patterns across reception centres.

Second, before the 2025 reform, participants could choose between self-arranged housing and reception centres, whereas residence in designated centres is now largely mandatory. This may introduce selection bias, as former residents had chosen to live in reception centres and may therefore differ from those who would have preferred self-arranged housing but are now required to remain in such centres.

Third, by only interviewing former residents of asylum accommodation centres who are currently residing in Sweden, the study excluded the experiences of individuals who are currently awaiting asylum decisions or whose applications had been rejected. Their experiences of the reception centre locations may differ significantly from those who were ultimately granted residence permits, and former residents may also view their experiences more positively in retrospect due to their successful settlement in Sweden.

Fourth, former residents' recollections may also have been influenced by memory bias, which refers to the tendency to distort past experiences. Nevertheless, they provided valuable insights into long-term integration outcomes and the broader consequences of asylum reception centre locations.

Fifth, most interviews were conducted in Swedish, which was neither the researcher's nor the participants' first language. This may have limited the depth and nuance of the data collected, as some meanings could have been lost or simplified in translation.

Finally, snowball sampling may have led to a relatively homogenous sample, as most participants originated from Turkey, potentially shaping the findings due to differing experiences across national and cultural backgrounds. The study also did not include participants' reasons for fleeing their country, as these were considered too sensitive and not directly relevant to the study's focus. Nevertheless, these circumstances may still have influenced their experiences in reception centres.

Limitations of Descriptive Spatial Analysis

The spatial analysis is subject to additional methodological limitations. First, the transformation of continuous spatial variables into ordinal categories introduces a loss of precision and reduces sensitivity to variation within categories, particularly for travel time measures where substantial differences may exist within the same classification.

Second, all final index scores rely on equal weighting of indicators, which assumes equal contribution of each dimension to overall accessibility. This is a simplifying assumption necessitated by the lack of empirical guidance for differential weighting in this specific context.

Third, the identification of language learning and civil society opportunities may be incomplete, as informal or locally organised initiatives are not consistently documented in official or digital sources.

Fourth, language learning accessibility is primarily measured in spatial terms and does not capture frequency or variations in availability, such as irregular schedules or seasonal fluctuations. Similarly, for civil society accessibility, differences in the frequency of services are not fully captured, as the difference between one and three events per week may have a substantial impact on accessibility and engagement.

Fifth, opportunities located just beyond the 30-minute threshold are excluded, although they may still be practically accessible in some cases.

Finally, the analysis provides a comparative spatial overview of accessibility conditions rather than a behavioural model of actual mobility patterns, service uptake, or individual decision-making.

5.4 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Ethical considerations guided both the selection of participants and the overall research design. Former residents of asylum reception centres were recruited in order to minimise risks associated with legal and social vulnerability, as they were generally in more stable circumstances than current asylum seekers. This reduced the ethical concerns related to participation and enabled participants to reflect more freely on their experiences.

The primary ethical considerations concerned the collection of personal narratives relating to potentially sensitive experiences. To minimise potential harm, participation was voluntary and participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, anonymity was ensured, and interviews were conducted in a respectful and sensitive manner.

My positionality as an intern at Interkultur, through which the interview participants were recruited, may have influenced interview dynamics by facilitating trust based on existing

relationships. As a fellow immigrant to Sweden, I could also relate to participants' experiences of settling in and navigating Swedish society, which may have contributed to a sense of mutual understanding and openness during the interviews. However, I am aware that my experience as a student migrant differs from those who have migrated under more difficult circumstances, and their integration trajectories may therefore be very different from my own. For this reason, I maintained an open and respectful approach, prioritising participants' perspectives throughout the research process.

My affiliation with Lund University may have shaped how participants perceived me, potentially introducing a sense of academic authority. This in turn may have made participants more cautious or polite in their responses, which could have influenced the extent to which critical views of institutions or systems were expressed. To reduce the perceived power imbalance, I clarified my role as a student researcher and emphasised the independent and confidential nature of the study. I also used an open-ended interview style to encourage participants to speak freely and in their own terms.

Lastly, prior experience working in asylum reception centres informed my decision to study this topic. However, it also shaped my initial understanding of the asylum reception system in Sweden, which may have introduced potential bias. For this reason, ongoing reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that participants' perspectives remained central.

6. Findings

6.1 Thematic Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews

In total, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with former residents of Swedish asylum reception centres. Participants represented seven of the eleven centres currently in operation: Boden, Burlöv, Malmö, Mölndal, Sigtuna, Stockholm, and Vänersborg. Most interviewees originated from Turkey, and the sample included both accompanied and unaccompanied asylum seekers, as well as both men and women. The majority of participants were between 35 and 44 years old. For a more detailed overview of the interviewees' profiles, see Appendix A.

The duration of residence in the centres ranged from two weeks to two years, while participants' experiences covered the period between 2016 and 2025. Several interviewees noted that the year of arrival influenced their experiences, particularly during the 2015–2016 migration crisis, when centres were perceived as overcrowded and stressful. In addition, interviewees who stayed longer in the centres generally described more negative experiences, suggesting that prolonged residence intensified feelings of stagnation, stress, and social isolation.

Overall, the findings indicate that the location of asylum reception centres matters not only in terms of geographical distance, but also in how it shapes access to language learning, public transport, and civil society organisations, all of which influence broader integration processes.

Spatial Differences in Centre Location and Lived Experiences

Interviewees described significant differences between centres depending on their location. Centres such as those in Malmö, Mölndal, and Stockholm were perceived as relatively accessible, while centres in Boden, Burlöv, Sigtuna and Vänersborg were described as more peripheral and detached from urban life. However, peripheral placement was not perceived entirely negatively. Several interviewees appreciated the surrounding natural environments, describing Swedish nature as calming and psychologically beneficial during stressful periods.

Despite these positive aspects, remote locations were also associated with social isolation and minimal contact with Swedish society. Several interviewees stated that this lack of interaction contributed to feelings of exclusion and perceptions of being unwelcome. This was

particularly challenging for participants who already perceived Swedish society as socially reserved and difficult to connect with.

Language Learning as Key for Integration

Language acquisition emerged as one of the most important themes in the interviews.

Participants consistently emphasised that learning Swedish was central to integration, social participation, and access to employment, with one interviewee stating that *‘Allt börjar med språk’* (*‘Everything begins with language’*). However, asylum seekers are generally unable to enrol in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) courses before receiving a Swedish personal number following an approved asylum application. As a result, many participants experienced long periods without formal language education.

Several interviewees argued that this delay negatively affected their integration trajectories. One participant described the situation as “starting life later,” explaining that asylum seekers are expected to integrate rapidly once residence permits are granted despite not having had access to formal language learning during the waiting period.

In the absence of formal language instruction, interviewees relied heavily on self-study and informal learning environments such as language cafés. These cafés were organised by libraries, churches, adult education organisations (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, ABF*), local cafés, and civil society organisations. Importantly, participants described language cafés not only as spaces for language acquisition, but also as key sites of social interaction and emotional support. For some asylum seekers, particularly those living in peripheral centres, these cafés represented their only point of contact with Swedish society.

One exception identified by participants was the Suggestopedia Centre in Vänersborg, which offered voluntary Swedish-language instruction focused on spoken communication. Experiences with this programme varied. Some participants described it as highly beneficial, enabling them to progress rapidly in Swedish and reducing the need for later SFI studies, while others found the programme less effective.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of everyday exposure to Swedish society for language learning. Some participants argued that living in more central areas facilitated informal learning through daily interactions in supermarkets, public spaces, and shops. At the

same time, participants noted that without basic language skills, even centrally located asylum seekers could experience profound loneliness and isolation.

Mobility Barriers

Mobility emerged as a major barrier to integration. Although public transport infrastructure was often physically accessible, asylum seekers frequently lacked the practical knowledge required to use it. Participants described difficulties understanding which bus to take or how to purchase tickets, especially as the Swedish public transport system is largely digitalised. Tickets are commonly bought via mobile applications requiring BankID, a Swedish personal number, or a bank account, which are resources unavailable to asylum seekers awaiting residence permits.

Physical ticket purchases were reported as both more difficult to access and more expensive than digital options, which often included discounted fares. Combined with the low daily allowance provided to asylum seekers at 26 SEK per day for adults (Migrationsverket, 2026), transport costs restricted participants' ability to purchase affordable food, attend language cafés, visit libraries, participate in activities, or maintain social relationships. Consequently, limited mobility reinforced social isolation and reduced opportunities for integration.

The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Daily Life

A recurring theme was the lack of meaningful daily activities within the reception centres. Interviewees described daily life as monotonous, marked by boredom and inactivity, which negatively impacted their mental well-being. The absence of opportunities for personal development and autonomy was frequently mentioned. Several interviewees stated that they preferred spending time outside the centres because there was “nothing to do” inside. These experiences were reinforced by long waiting times during the asylum process, which created feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness regarding the future.

In this context, civil society organisations played a significant role in structuring everyday lives and providing social interaction hubs. They organised language cafés and workshops, and offered practical support such as clothing donations, assistance with healthcare-related costs, and support with children's schoolwork. These activities were particularly significant for those living in more isolated centres, where other forms of social contact were limited.

Interviewees frequently expressed gratitude towards volunteers, with one interviewee describing volunteers as those who “rehabilitate you,” illustrating the importance of these interactions for well-being and social connection.

Personal Agency and Adaptation Within Structural Constraints

While structural conditions strongly shaped integration experiences, interviewees also emphasised the role of personal initiative. Some participants actively sought opportunities to integrate through volunteering, attending adult education or online courses, or organising activities themselves. One participant described contacting local authorities and the Red Cross to re-establish a language café in his village after existing services had been withdrawn, an initiative which was ultimately successful.

Others actively sought opportunities to contribute their professional skills. One former teacher described how she and several friends approached the Red Cross to ask whether they could volunteer in schools. Through collaboration between the organisation, municipalities, and schools, they were eventually able to work as teaching assistants. She described this opportunity as transformative, allowing her to “feel alive again” by contributing to society and regaining a sense of purpose.

Similarly, interviewees described how asylum seekers often attempted to work or contribute despite limited formal possibilities. One participant recalled an Afghan man who learned Swedish and worked in the centre’s kitchen during his three-year stay, earning a small daily payment in addition to his allowance. These examples illustrate how asylum seekers actively sought participation, even within restricted structural conditions.

Conclusion of Interview Findings

The interview findings suggest that asylum reception centres in Sweden primarily fulfil basic humanitarian needs such as shelter and safety, but often fail to facilitate early integration. As one interviewee argued: *“They fulfil the basic needs, but if you want people to actually join the community for real, they need to actually do something.”*

Location, access to language learning, mobility, and opportunities for meaningful activities all significantly shaped participants’ experiences. Peripheral placement did not necessarily

reduce well-being in itself; however, when combined with limited mobility and a lack of opportunities for participation, it negatively affected integration trajectories and mental health. One participant summarised the broader impact of peripheral placement by stating: *“It affects the psychology and it affects everything. It affects your shopping, your health, your friendships, totally your life.”*

Nevertheless, civil society organisations and volunteers often compensated for institutional gaps by creating spaces for learning, participation, and social connection. The findings also indicate that asylum seekers demonstrate considerable agency and a willingness to contribute to society despite structural constraints.

6.2 Descriptive Spatial Analysis

The second phase of the analysis presents a descriptive spatial analysis of asylum reception centres in Sweden. It categorises the centres by urban centrality and constructs a spatial accessibility index for the well-being and integration resources identified in the interviews. These resources include access to public transport, language learning opportunities, and civil society organisations. The aim is to assess whether access to these resources is evenly distributed across reception centres or varies according to their level of urban centrality.

6.2.1 Levels of Urban Centrality

To assess differences in access to integration resources based on the location of each centre, each centre was classified according to its level of urban centrality, as shown in Table 4. This categorisation distinguishes between urban, suburban, and peripheral locations based on settlement hierarchy, population density, and degree of integration into regional transport and service networks.

Table 4. Classification of Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden by Urban Centrality (2026)

Centre	Urban Centrality Classification	Justification
Boden	Peripheral	Outside major urban regions; low population density; weak transport connectivity
Burlöv	Suburban	Malmö metropolitan region, strong transport connectivity; limited local services
Flen	Peripheral	Outside metropolitan regions; low service density; long travel times to urban centres
Halmstad	Peripheral	Low service and population density; weak regional connectivity
Härnösand	Peripheral	Low service and population density; outside major urban regions
Malmö	Urban	Metropolitan core; high population and service density; extensive public transport network
Mölnadal	Suburban	Gothenburg metropolitan commuting zone; strong commuting connectivity; moderate local service provision
Sigtuna	Suburban	Stockholm metropolitan commuting zone; limited local service provision
Stockholm	Urban	Capital metropolitan region; very high population and service density; extensive transport infrastructure
Vänersborg	Peripheral	Limited local service provision; moderate connectivity to Gothenburg metropolitan region
Västerås	Suburban	Medium-sized city; strong local service provision; moderate connectivity to Stockholm metropolitan region

The classification demonstrates considerable variation in the spatial positioning of reception centres across Sweden. While some centres are located within major metropolitan regions with dense service networks, others are situated in smaller municipalities or more geographically isolated areas. These differences are expected to influence access to integration resources examined in the following sections.

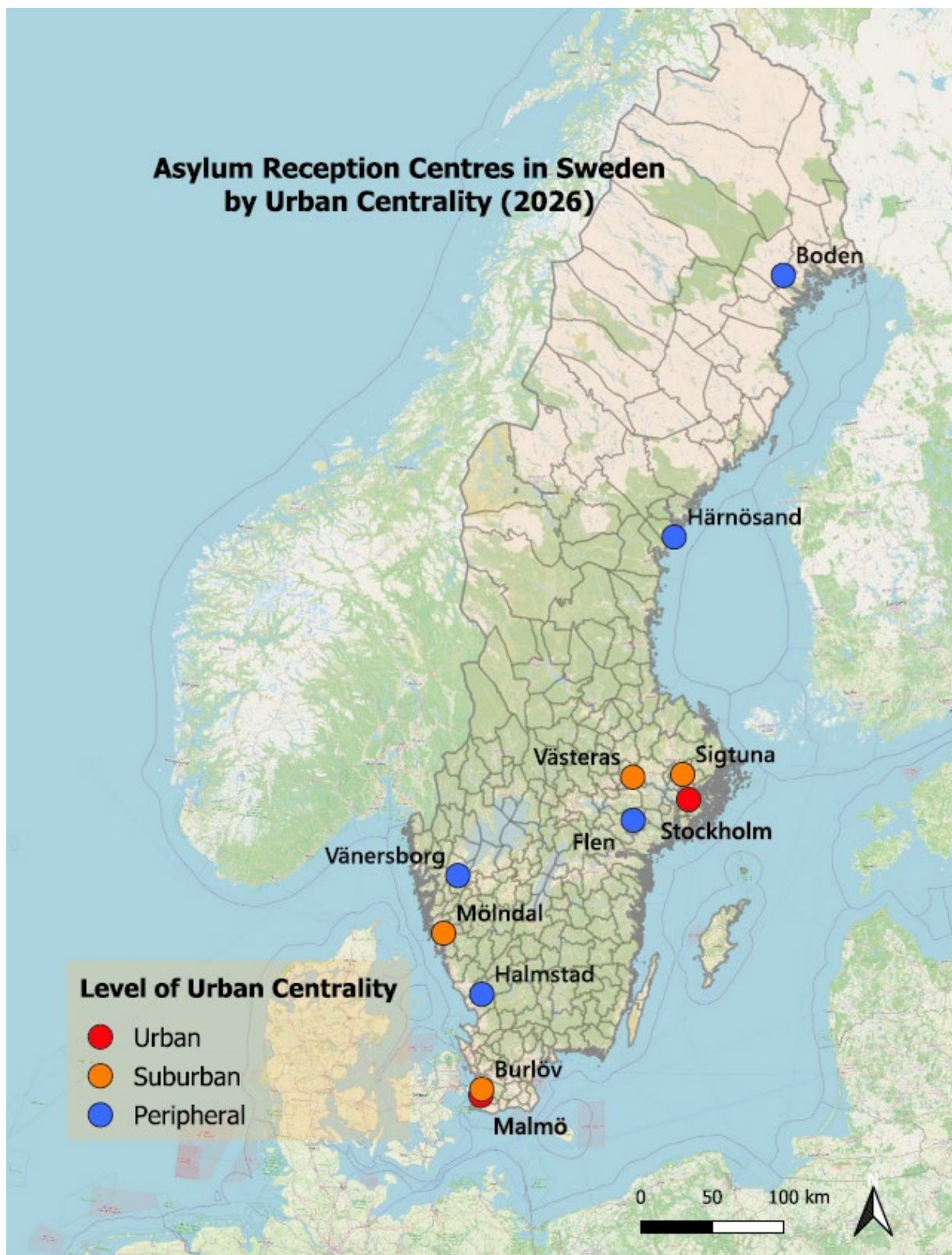


Figure 1. Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden by Urban Centrality (2026)

Source: Author's own work based on QGIS

6.2.2 Public Transport Accessibility

Table 5. Accessibility Index for Public Transport for Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Distance score	Frequency score	Travel time score	Cost score	Accessibility index (4-12)	Category
Boden	2	2	3	3	11	High
Burlöv	1	3	3	3	10	High
Flen	2	1	3	2	8	Moderate
Halmstad	3	2	1	1	7	Moderate
Härnösand	1	2	3	2	8	Moderate
Malmö	3	3	2	3	11	High
Mölnadal	2	1	2	2	7	Moderate
Sigtuna	2	1	3	1	7	Moderate
Stockholm	1	3	2	1	7	Moderate
Vänersborg	2	3	2	2	9	High
Västerås	1	3	2	2	8	Moderate

The accessibility index reveals that public transport access is unevenly distributed across asylum reception centres, although the results are not strongly polarised, with scores ranging from 7 to 11. Overall, no centre falls into an extreme low-access category, suggesting that all locations maintain at least a basic level of connectivity to public transport networks. However, meaningful differences emerge in the quality and combination of accessibility conditions.

Malmö, Boden, and Burlöv achieve the highest accessibility scores (11 and 10), reflecting strong overall performance across multiple indicators, including high service frequency, relatively short travel times, and favourable cost conditions. These centres benefit from either urban proximity or well-integrated transport systems, resulting in comparatively advantageous mobility conditions.

In contrast, centres such as Halmstad, Mölnadal, Sigtuna, and Stockholm record lower final index scores (7). Stockholm's relatively low score indicates that high urban centrality does not automatically translate into high public transport accessibility. In this case, weaker performance in cost and distance-related indicators drives the result, suggesting that structural factors beyond urban location influence accessibility outcomes.

Centres in the moderate range (8–9), such as Flen, Härnösand, Västerås, and Vänersborg, show mixed accessibility profiles. These cases illustrate that similar overall scores can result from different combinations of advantages and disadvantages. Some centres compensate for lower frequency through better travel times or costs, while others show the opposite pattern.

Across individual indicators, the results show that no single factor consistently explains variation in overall accessibility. Instead, differences in distance, service frequency, travel

time, and cost interact in different ways across centres, producing varied conditions for public transport access. This indicates that mobility inequality across reception centres is not strictly determined by spatial category (urban, suburban, peripheral), but by the specific configuration of transport conditions in each location.

The results show that all centres achieve at least moderate to high levels of transport provision, suggesting that public transport is generally physically available. This aligns with the interview findings, where participants also described public transport as physically accessible. However, interviewees emphasised that mobility in practice was often constrained by factors such as transport costs, digital ticketing systems, and limited knowledge of how to navigate the system. While the index includes cost as an indicator, it does not capture these additional informational and digital barriers. As a result, lived accessibility may still vary significantly even where structural provision appears relatively consistent.

6.2.3 Language Learning Accessibility

Table 6. Accessibility Index for Language Learning for Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Availability score	Distance score	Accessibility index (2-6)	Category
Boden	2	2	4	Moderate
Burlöv	1	2	3	Moderate
Flen	1	1	2	Low
Halmstad	1	2	3	Moderate
Härnösand	3	2	5	High
Malmö	3	2	5	High
Mölnadal	2	2	4	Moderate
Sigtuna	2	3	5	High
Stockholm	3	3	6	High
Vänersborg	3	3	6	High
Västerås	2	2	4	Moderate

The language learning accessibility index reveals clear spatial variation in access to language cafés and schools across asylum reception centres, with scores ranging from 2 to 6. Overall, most centres exhibit moderate to high accessibility, with the notable exception of Flen, which records the lowest level of access.

Stockholm and Vänersborg achieve the highest accessibility scores (6), followed by Malmö, Härnösand, and Sigstuna. These centres benefit from either a higher number of language

learning opportunities, shorter travel distances, or a combination of both. This pattern suggests that favourable conditions for early language acquisition can be found across urban, suburban, and even peripheral settings.

These results align with the interview findings. Participants living in metropolitan Malmö reported access to a wide range of language cafés outside the reception centre, while participants in the peripheral centre Vänersborg emphasised the wide availability of on-site language cafés and schools.

On the other end of the scale, Flen (2) records the lowest accessibility scores due to minimal availability and proximity. This suggests a compounded disadvantage where structural scarcity and geographic remoteness reinforce one another.

Other centres, including Boden, Burlöv, Halmstad, Mölndal, and Västerås fall within the moderate category (3-4). In these cases, accessibility is sufficient but still constrained. All these centres fall into the suburban or peripheral category, suggesting that areas outside major urban cores tend to offer fewer language learning opportunities and less convenient access due to weaker provision and longer distances.

In summary, access to language learning opportunities is unevenly distributed across reception centres, although urban centrality does not appear to be a decisive factor. Both larger and smaller cities demonstrate that strong language provision is possible. However, in more peripheral centres, limited availability can be exacerbated by weak spatial proximity, reinforcing broader geographical inequalities in integration-related opportunities. These spatial patterns largely reflect the interview findings, where participants in more peripheral locations emphasised the importance of nearby informal language learning opportunities, which often represented their only point of contact with Swedish society.

6.2.4 Civil Society Organisation Accessibility

Table 7. Accessibility Index for Civil Society Organisations for Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	External CSOs score	Travel time score	On-site CSO score	Frequency score	Accessibility index (4-12)	Category
Boden	1	1	1	1	4	Low
Burlöv	2	2	2	3	9	Moderate
Flen	1	1	1	1	4	Low
Halmstad	1	1	2	3	7	Moderate
Härnösand	1	1	1	1	4	Low
Malmö	2	3	3	3	11	High
Mölndal	3	2	1	1	7	Moderate
Sigtuna	1	1	2	3	7	Moderate
Stockholm	3	3	1	1	8	Moderate
Vänersborg	1	1	3	3	8	Moderate
Västerås	3	2	1	1	7	Moderate

The civil society organisation (CSO) accessibility index shows a highly uneven distribution of civil society access across asylum reception centres, with scores ranging from 4 to 11.

Overall, most centres fall within the moderate range, while several peripheral centres score low and only one metropolitan centre achieves a high level of accessibility.

Malmö stands out as the only centre with high accessibility (11), reflecting strong performance across all indicators, including external CSO availability, short travel times, and a dense and active on-site organisational presence. This suggests a strong institutional support environment linked to its urban setting.

On the contrary, the peripheral centres Boden, Flen, and Härnösand record the lowest scores (4), reflecting a complete absence of nearby external organisations and no on-site CSO provision or activity. These centres therefore show very limited civil society engagement, suggesting that their peripheral location reduces access to surrounding organisations, while the lack of on-site initiatives fails to offset this spatial remoteness. This limited support environment may constrain residents' well-being and reduce opportunities for social integration.

Most other centres fall within the moderate category (7–9), including Burlöv, Halmstad, Mölndal, Sigtuna, Stockholm, Vänersborg, and Västerås. These cases typically reflect mixed accessibility patterns, where stronger performance in one dimension (such as external CSO availability or on-site provision) compensates for weaker performance in others. For example,

Stockholm and Mölndal benefit from strong external networks, while Vänersborg and Sigtuna rely more heavily on on-site provision.

To conclude, access to civil society organisations is unevenly distributed and strongly shaped by spatial location. Urban centres tend to offer more comprehensive support structures, whereas peripheral centres rely more on on-site provision, with particularly low accessibility levels where this is absent. This pattern suggests that opportunities for social support and integration are spatially uneven and closely tied to the local organisational landscape.

This also confirms the interview findings, where participants described civil society organisations as key sources of emotional support, social interaction, and meaningful daily activities. In peripheral centres, interviewees relied more heavily on CSO access for daily structure, participation, and self-development. In peripheral centres where such provision was limited, participants frequently reported boredom and inactivity.

6.2.5 Combined Accessibility of Integration Resources

Table 8. Combined Accessibility Index of Integration Resources for Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Urban/ Suburban/ Peripheral	Mobility access	Language learning opportunities access	CSO access
Boden	Peripheral	High	Moderate	Low
Burlöv	Suburban	High	Moderate	Moderate
Flen	Peripheral	Moderate	Low	Low
Halmstad	Peripheral	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Härnösand	Peripheral	Moderate	High	Low
Malmö	Urban	High	High	High
Mölndal	Suburban	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Sigtuna	Suburban	Moderate	High	Moderate
Stockholm	Urban	Moderate	High	Moderate
Vänersborg	Peripheral	High	High	Moderate
Västerås	Suburban	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

The combined accessibility index provides an overview of how access to public transport, language learning opportunities, and civil society organisations varies across urban, suburban, and peripheral reception centres. Overall, while urban asylum centres tend to display higher and more balanced levels of accessibility, the relationship between spatial classification and access is not strictly linear.

Malmö stands out as the only centre with consistently high accessibility across all three dimensions. This indicates a strong cumulative advantage associated with dense urban infrastructure, where mobility systems, language learning provision, and civil society organisations are all readily available and spatially concentrated. This reinforces the role of major metropolitan areas as key hubs for integration-related resources.

In contrast, peripheral centres display more uneven and fragmented accessibility profiles. Flen represents the most constrained case, combining moderate mobility access with low access to both language learning opportunities and civil society support. Similarly, Härnösand shows strong language learning access but weak CSO availability, while Boden and Vänersborg exhibit relatively high mobility access alongside uneven access in other domains. Halmstad, by comparison, demonstrates a more balanced profile, maintaining moderate accessibility across all three dimensions. These patterns suggest that peripheral locations do not uniformly lack resources, but instead tend to exhibit selective strengths alongside structural gaps.

Suburban centres show more intermediate and mixed accessibility patterns. Burlöv, Mölndal, Sigtuna, and Västerås generally display moderate and relatively balanced access across all three dimensions. This indicates that suburban locations often benefit from partial integration into nearby urban systems, but do not consistently achieve high accessibility across all resource types.

Among the integration resources examined, language learning opportunities and civil society organisations tend to concentrate more strongly in urban areas, although suburban and peripheral centres can still provide relatively favourable access. However, where these resources are only limitedly available in non-urban locations, greater distances can further restrict accessibility. In contrast, mobility access shows less pronounced spatial differentiation, with suburban and peripheral centres achieving moderate to high accessibility scores.

Overall, the spatial analysis broadly confirms the experiences described in the interviews. Non-urban centres such as Burlöv and Vänersborg were identified by participants as relatively isolated, with weaker access to integration-related resources and a strong reliance on on-site language and civil society support. Where such support was limited, participants reported negative effects on well-being. In contrast, central centres such as Malmö were associated with stronger overall resource availability. However, urban centrality alone does not guarantee favourable accessibility conditions, as centres vary in their specific combinations of

advantages and disadvantages across different resource domains, a pattern also reflected in the interview findings.

Conclusion of the Spatial Analysis

The descriptive spatial analysis shows that access to integration-related resources is multi-dimensional and only partially aligned with urban, suburban and peripheral classifications. While urban centres generally provide more comprehensive accessibility, especially considering language learning opportunities and civil society support, several non-urban centres display strengths in specific domains, e.g. strong availability of on-site civil society organisations. This highlights an uneven and context-dependent geography of integration support across reception centres in Sweden, rather than a simple urban-periphery divide would suggest.

This uneven geographic distribution of integration resources across asylum reception centres in Sweden points to potential inequalities in asylum seekers' conditions for well-being and integration. Since asylum seekers cannot choose the centres to which they are assigned, unequal access to integration-related resources may translate into unequal opportunities for well-being, participation, and long-term integration outcomes.

Building on these descriptive findings, the following discussion section relates the observed spatial patterns to existing literature and the theoretical framework in order to further interpret their implications for integration, spatial inequality, and institutional responsibility.

7. Discussion

This discussion situates the findings within the existing literature and theory to interpret how the location of asylum reception centres shapes asylum seekers' well-being and integration.

European studies examining the spatial organisation of asylum reception centres have found that accommodation is often located in peripheral areas, restricting access to services and contributing to social and spatial exclusion from the host society. The findings of this study partly support this pattern, showing that while some reception centres in Sweden are located in peripheral areas, others are situated in relatively central locations. The findings further suggest that peripherality does not necessarily result in social and spatial exclusion, as some centres provide strong transport connections, language learning opportunities, and civil society support that can foster a sense of inclusion in Swedish society among asylum seekers. Nevertheless, in peripheral centres where such resources are limited, social and spatial exclusion appears considerably more pronounced.

From the perspective of the integration theory developed by Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), the findings suggest that spatial conditions shape different dimensions of integration in interconnected ways. Structural integration, understood as access to rights and key institutions within the host society, may be hindered when asylum seekers have limited access to formal language education. In peripheral centres, reliance on informal learning opportunities such as language cafés becomes particularly difficult where such opportunities are scarce or absent. Limited language acquisition may in turn reduce opportunities for employment or further education after receiving residence permits.

Cultural integration, which involves mutual adaptation and cultural learning between asylum seekers and the host society, is also limited when exposure between two groups is minimal. This is the case in peripheral locations with limited mobility options and weak civil society support, thereby reducing possibilities for cultural exchange. Similarly, social integration is impeded when asylum seekers have few opportunities to establish social connections or participate in shared social spaces. In several peripheral centres, the lack of accessible social structures restricted meaningful contact with the host society.

Finally, identificatory integration is shaped by the combined effects of these dimensions. When structural, cultural, and social integration are constrained by peripheral locations and limited support structures, the development of a sense of belonging and identification with Swedish society may also be delayed.

These patterns also imply a form of spatial governance, where the placement of reception centres shapes asylum seekers' access to resources and opportunities in their daily lives. This study shows that it matters whether reception centres are located in urban, suburban, or peripheral areas, as these contexts offer unequal access to mobility, participation and integration opportunities. In particular, non-urban centres place asylum seekers at greater distances from key resources, increasing their reliance on services provided on-site. When on-site provision is limited and mobility options are limited, asylum seekers risk being effectively confined to the immediate surroundings of the centre. This, in turn, affects their well-being and sense of belonging. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that asylum seekers are not passive recipients of spatial structures, but actively seek opportunities for participation through volunteering, education, and community initiatives.

Finally, from a spatial theory perspective, the findings show that asylum reception centres are not neutral spaces but are to be understood through the concepts of conceived, perceived, and lived space. Conceived space refers to the institutional planning of centres as administratively efficient and manageable spaces by the Swedish Migration Agency. Perceived space concerns their material organisation, with the findings showing that location actively shapes access to transport, services, and social interaction. Lived space reflects residents' everyday experiences, which varied depending on the spatial location of the centre and the availability of nearby activities and support structures. In particular, peripheral centres were often associated with negative experiences due to limited social interaction and stronger feelings of exclusion, although civil society organisations attempted to mitigate these spatial barriers through support initiatives and social activities.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Key Findings

Sweden's 2025 reform of the reception system, shifting from a decentralised towards a more centralised model, has implications for how asylum seekers experience conditions for well-being and integration. This study shows that the location of these centres is associated with variation in access to key integration resources, although urban centrality alone does not fully explain these differences.

Access to language learning opportunities, public transport, and civil society organisations emerges as particularly important for integration outcomes. Limited access to language education delays navigation of Swedish society, social network formation, and entry into the labour market. Mobility constraints further restrict participation, shaped by high transport costs, digitalised ticketing systems requiring Swedish identification, and limited transport knowledge. These barriers are especially pronounced in peripheral centres, where opportunities for interaction with Swedish society are already more restricted. Civil society organisations partly mitigate these constraints by providing spaces for emotional and practical support, as well as opportunities for social activities.

The descriptive spatial analysis shows that access to integration resources is multi-dimensional and only partially aligned with urban, suburban, and peripheral classifications. While urban centres generally provide more comprehensive accessibility, particularly in relation to language learning opportunities and civil society support, several non-urban centres perform strongly in specific domains, e.g. strong availability of on-site civil society organisations. However, in peripheral centres where both on-site services and mobility is limited, asylum seekers are confined to the reception centre environment, negatively impacting their well-being and integration journeys. This highlights an uneven and context-dependent geography of integration support across reception centres in Sweden, rather than a simple urban–periphery divide.

Overall, asylum seekers' conditions for well-being and integration are shaped by a combination of spatial location and resource availability. Since asylum seekers have no choice over their assigned reception centre, these spatial differences may translate into unequal opportunities for participation and long-term integration outcomes.

8.2 Policy Recommendations

As the Swedish Migration Agency continues to implement and evaluate the 2025 reform of the reception system, while considering further expansion of reception locations, this study offers several policy recommendations regarding the spatial and social conditions of reception centres.

- Minimum standards for integration resources should be introduced across all reception centres to ensure more equal access regardless of location. In particular, language learning opportunities and civil society activities should be more evenly distributed.
- Reception centres can function effectively in non-urban areas, on the condition that transport accessibility is improved through subsidies, simplified ticket systems, and higher travel allowances to reduce mobility constraints. This is particularly important for peripheral centres, where asylum seekers must travel longer distances and make greater effort to access central services and social activities.
- Civil society and language support could be expanded through mobile or outreach-based initiatives, ensuring that services also reach more remote locations.

Overall, these measures would not require major structural reform, but rather targeted adjustments aimed at reducing spatial inequality and ensuring that asylum seekers' place of residence does not determine their access to essential integration resources.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Profile of interview participants

Interviewee	Gender	Age range	Origin Country	Centre location	Year	Length of stay	Interview language
1	Male	35-44	Turkey	Malmö; Burlöv	2023	2 months; 2 months	Swedish
2	Female	35-44	Turkey	Stockholm	2021	10 days	Swedish
3	Female	35-44	Turkey	Vänersborg	2024-2025	13 months	Turkish and Swedish
4	Male	25-34	China	Sigtuna; temporary centre in Söderhamn	2016	2 days; 2 weeks	English
5	Male	35-44	Turkey	Mölnadal	2019	3 weeks	Swedish
6	Female	35-44	Turkey	Boden (in apartments arranged by Swedish Migration Agency)	2019-2021	2 years	English
7	Male	35-44	Turkey	Mölnadal	2019	2 weeks	Swedish
8	Female	35-44	Turkey	Mölnadal; Vänersborg	2023-2025	3 weeks; 17 months	English
9	Male	45-54	Turkey	Mölnadal; Vänersborg	2024	6 months; 6 months	Swedish

Appendix B. Interview Guide

1. Background
 - a. How would you describe your gender?
 - b. What is your age?
 - c. Which country do you consider your country of origin?
 - d. If you feel comfortable, how would you describe your cultural or personal background?
 - e. Where was the asylum reception centre where you stayed?
 - f. In what year did you live there, and for approximately how long?
 - g. Who did you live there with (e.g. alone, with family, with children, or others)?
2. Location & Physical Environment
 - a. How would you describe the area around the reception centre?
 - b. How far did it feel to the nearest city or town?
 - c. What kinds of services or facilities were nearby (e.g. shops, healthcare, schools, parks)?
 - d. What did you think about the location when you first arrived? Has your view changed over time?
 - e. Was there anything about the physical environment that you found particularly helpful or challenging?
 - f. In your opinion, is it better to locate an asylum centre in the city or in a small village? Why?
3. Mobility & Access
 - a. How easy or difficult did it feel to leave the centre and travel to other places?
 - b. How would you describe the public transport options?
 - c. Did distance or transport affect your ability to:
 - i. attend activities?
 - ii. meet people?
 - iii. access services?
 - d. Can you describe a typical trip you had to make (e.g. to a city, school, or activity)?
4. Daily Life & Well-being
 - a. What did a typical day look like for you while living there?
 - b. How did you usually spend your free time?
 - c. Was it easy for you to access places where you could relax, such as parks or recreational areas?
 - d. How did living in that location affect your well-being or stress levels?
5. Social interaction & Integration
 - a. How would you describe your interactions with people outside the centre?
 - b. Did you have opportunities to meet people from the local community?
 - c. What made it easier or harder to interact with Swedish society?
 - d. Did you feel welcomed and connected to the surrounding community? Why or why not?

6. Work, School & Opportunities
 - a. Were you working, studying, or participating in any programs during your stay?
 - b. If yes, how easy or difficult was it to get there?
 - c. How accessible was education (for you or your children)?
 - d. Did the location of the centre affect your ability to work or study? How?
7. Feelings & Perceptions
 - a. How did you feel living in the reception centre overall?
 - b. Did you prefer spending time inside the centre or outside? Why?
8. Reflection & Impact
 - a. Looking back, how do you think living in that location influenced your integration process?
 - b. Do you think things would have been different if the centre had been located elsewhere? How?
 - c. What were the biggest challenges you faced because of the location?
 - d. What worked well that you think should be kept?
9. Improvements & Suggestions
 - a. What would you improve about the location or environment of the centre?
 - b. What would you recommend to policymakers when deciding where to place reception centres?
10. Closing
 - a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

Appendix C. Classification Thresholds for Accessibility Indicators

Classification thresholds for language learning accessibility indicators

	Indicator	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
1.	Number of language cafés/schools within 30-min travel time	0-1	2-3	4+
2.	Distance to nearest language café/school	>5km	1-5km	<1 km

Classification thresholds for civil society accessibility indicators

	Indicator	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
1.	External CSOs within 30-min travel time	0 organisations	1-2 organisations	3+ organisations
2.	Travel time to nearest CSO	No access (NA)	>20 minutes	≤20 minutes
3.	On-site CSOs	0 organisations	1-2 organisations	3+ organisations
4.	Frequency of on-site CSO activities	None (0)	Occasional (1)	Weekly (2)

Appendix D. Categorisation of Accessibility Scores

Language Learning Accessibility Index Categories

Total score	Category
2	Low accessibility
3-4	Moderate accessibility
5-6	High accessibility

Civil Society Accessibility Index Categories

Total score	Category
4-6	Low accessibility
7-9	Moderate accessibility
10-12	High accessibility

Appendix E. Public Transport Accessibility of Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Distance to bus stop	Frequency of service	Travel time to nearest urban centre	Travel cost (one-way ticket)
Boden	450-750 m	20-40 min	13-18 min	32 SEK
Burlöv	760 m	3-15 min	13-17 min	32 SEK
Flen	450 m	30-90 min	11-14 min	35 SEK
Halmstad	30 m	15-60 min	52-93 min	54 SEK
Härnösand	580 m	15-45 min	8-17 min	34 SEK
Malmö	10 m	5-10 min	24-33 min	32 SEK
Mölndal	170 m	30 min	21-34 min	37 SEK
Sigtuna	100 m	30 min	9-31 min	43 SEK
Stockholm	560 m	5-10 min	22-27 min	43 SEK
Vänersborg	270 m	10-30 min	19-27 min	37 SEK
Västerås	800 m	3-10 min	21-31 min	33 SEK

Appendix F. List of Language Cafés and Language Schools near Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Name of institution	City	Type
Boden	Svenska kyrkan (Edefors församlingshem)	Boden	Language café
	Svenska kyrkan (Rörvikskyrkan)	Boden	Language café
	Röda Korset	Boden	Language café
Burlöv	Arlövs bibliotek	Arlöv	Language café
Flen	Equmeniakyrkan	Malmköping	Language café
Halmstad	Svenska kyrkan	Oskarström	Language café
Härnösand	Café Trädgårn	Härnösand	Language café
	Röda Korset	Härnösand	Language café
	Svenska kyrkan	Älandsbro	Language café
	Equmeniakyrkan	Härnösand	Language café
Malmö	Garage	Malmö	Language café
	Lindängenbiblioteket	Malmö	Language café
	Stadsbiblioteket	Malmö	Language café
	Rosengårdsbiblioteket	Malmö	Language café
	RSFL Malmö	Malmö	Language café
	ABF Malmö	Malmö	Language café
Mölndal	Mötesplats åby	Mölndal	Language café
	Café Möllan	Mölndal	Language café
Sigtuna	Sigtunahem	Valsta	Language café
	Märsta bibliotek	Märsta	Language café
Stockholm	Kulturhuset	Stockholm	Language café
	Röda Korset	Stockholm	Language café
	Vännernas Samfund	Stockholm	Language café
	Alviks bibliotek	Stockholm	Language café
	Kungsholmens bibliotek	Stockholm	Language café
	Telefonplans bibliotek	Stockholm	Language café
Vänersborg	Suggestopedia Center	Vänersborg	Informal language school
	Röda Korset	Vänersborg	Language café
	Equmeniakyrkan	Vänersborg	Language café
	Vänersborgs bibliotek	Vänersborg	Language café
Västerås	Västerås huvudbibliotek	Västerås	Language café
	Viksängs bibliotek	Västerås	Language café
	Röda Korset	Västerås	Language café

Appendix G. Availability and Proximity of Language Cafés and Language Schools near Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Number of language cafés/schools within 30-min travel time	Distance to nearest language café/school
Boden	3	850 m
Burlöv	1	2,1 km
Flen	0	13,8 km
Halmstad	1	7,8 km
Härnösand	4	1,2 km
Malmö	6	2,4 km
Mölnadal	2	9,4 km
Sigtuna	2	1,9 km
Stockholm	6	650 m
Vänersborg	4	10 m
Västerås	3	6,7 km

Appendix H. List of External and On-Site Civil Society Organisations near Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	External CSOs	On-site CSOs
Boden		
Burlöv	Interkultur	Röda Korset; Rädda Barnen; SENSUS
Flen		
Halmstad		Röda Korset; Mötesplats Spenshult
Härnösand		
Malmö	Nordisk Hjälp; Flyktinggruppernas Riksråd (FARR); RSFL	Malmö Helps; Röda Korset; Rädda Barnen; SENSUS
Mölnadal	Nätverk för integration; Café Möllan; Bifrostkyrkan; Mötesplats Åby; Röda Korset	
Sigtuna		Flyktinggruppernas Riksråd (FARR); Röda Korset
Stockholm	Refugees Welcome Stockholm; RSFL; TIA Stockholm; Rainbow Refugees Sweden	
Vänersborg		Support Group Network (SGN); Röda Korset; Rädda Barnen; Svenska Kyrkan; Salemkyrkan
Västerås	Tillsammans gör vi skillnad; RFSL; Röda Korset; Rainbow Refugees Sweden	

Appendix I. Availability and Proximity of Civil Society Organisations near Asylum Reception Centres in Sweden (2026)

Centre	Number of external CSOs within 30-min travel time	Travel time to nearest external CSO	Number of on-site CSOs	Frequency of on-site CSO (0=none, 1= occasional, 2 = weekly)	Accessibility level
Boden	0	NA	0	0	Low
Burlöv	1	29 min	3	2	Medium
Flen	0	NA	0	0	Low
Halmstad	0	NA	2	2	Medium
Härnösand	0	NA	0	0	Low
Malmö	3	19 min	4	2	High
Mölndal	5	23 min	0	0	Medium
Sigtuna	0	NA	2	2	Medium
Stockholm	5	5 min	0	0	High
Vänersborg	0	NA	5	2	High
Västerås	4	24 min	0	0	Medium

NA=Not Applicable

Appendix J. AI Contribution Statement

ChatGPT and Grammarly were used in this thesis as language support tools to improve clarity and overall academic writing quality. I provided my own text as input to both tools, which suggested alternative phrasings to improve readability and coherence, as well as alternative word choices and synonyms. These tools were used across all sections of the thesis. In addition, ChatGPT guided me in how to approach the design of the descriptive spatial analysis.