



This is what we want!

The churches and migration issues

This is what we want!

The churches and migration issues

Our Christian faith has been moulded in experiences of exile and flight. Jesus Himself experienced the fate of a refugee as a child and grew up in an occupied country with a foreign language and a foreign culture. Jesus shows us in words and in deeds the example of love; to love one another and in particular to care for the poor, the powerless and the discriminated. In the New Testament the radical view of equality is formulated that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ." (Galatians 3:28) Welcoming the stranger into fellowship is an action in the Christian faith which carries a promise of being blessed. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." (Hebrews 13:2)

That is why Christian churches in Sweden – as well as throughout the world – have become involved with refugees and immigrants in different ways. This has been primarily expressed through support to persons who seek out the church – it can be the need to talk or to obtain legal counselling, economic support or even a sanctuary from persecution – as well as through visits, for example, to the Migration Board's detention centres. Migration is to a high degree an issue that knows no national boundaries. Christian churches in Sweden are working through international development aid for a world in which people will not be forced to flee from their homes. We are also involved in providing humanitarian aid to refugee camps and to vulnerable migrant workers.

However as churches and as Christians we are also called to be salt in the world, to protest against injustices and to work for a better society for all people. Very few persons in Sweden could have avoided noting the Easter Appeal for a

humane asylum policy which the Christian Council of Sweden launched in the spring of 2005. The Easter Appeal spread like wildfire throughout the country and contributed to an agreement in the Swedish Riksdag which in the spring of 2006 gave many refugees who had been in hiding a new possibility to obtain a residence permit. But our task is not over. We wish to continue to examine the law as well as political and legal practice and the work of the authorities within the migration policy field in a critical and constructive manner. This document is an expression of this ambition.

We focus here on the fundamental values and ethical principles that are the starting point for this examination. These values and principles are based in part on our Christian faith and are illustrated with Biblical quotations in this text and, in part, on the work of the international community in the field of human rights, which is illustrated by excerpts from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as from relevant human rights conventions.

We have not just chosen refugees and asylum seekers as our focal point but also other persons who can neither be classified as refugees nor asylum seekers but who nonetheless are here in Sweden for different reasons – people who are seeking to improve their life chances here, who are in demand on the black labour market or who fall victims of human trafficking.

The aim of this brochure is to be brief and concise – this means that it does not give room for deeper discussions or problematisation of the issues. Our work will continue and provide us with the opportunity for further input and reflection.

This document has been approved by the General Assembly of the Christian Council of Sweden 25-26th April 2007

1. Every person is created in the image of God and has the right to a life in dignity

*“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him”
(Genesis 1:27)*

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. (UN Universal Declaration Article 1)

*“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”
(ibid. Article 3)*

“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (ibid. Article 14)

*“No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”
(UN Convention Against Torture Article 3)*

Therefore we want

- the fears and protection needs of people seeking asylum to be taken more seriously.
- to avoid ever sending people to countries where they risk being subjected to torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- always to avoid that people be sent to a first country of asylum where there is no access to an asylum procedure.
- people who are suffering from life-threatening illnesses such as aggressive HIV to be allowed to stay in Sweden if they cannot afford or do not have access to treatment in their home countries.
- legal possibilities to be introduced to enter Sweden and the European Union in order to seek asylum.

Therefore we are critical when

- people who try to enter the European Union are forced to take life-threatening risks or live in misery at the borders of the Union.
- persons who shall be deported from Sweden are held in custody for long periods.
- much too little is done to prevent people from being lured to Sweden for the purpose of sexual exploitation or to work under slave-like conditions.

Therefore we encourage each other to

- support in a respectful manner vulnerable persons who seek asylum in Sweden or who live in Sweden without a formal legal status.
- support persons in their country of origin through development aid.

2. Basic rights must apply to everyone

“And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.” (Galatians 3:28)

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

Therefore we want

- Sweden to ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- people who reside in Sweden without legal status to be given the same right to health care as the rest of the population.
- more ways to be opened for travel to Sweden and the European Union in order to work.

Therefore we are critical when

- persons who seek asylum in Sweden because of their political or religious beliefs or sexual orientation and who risk persecution in their home countries are expelled to their home countries with the indirect admonition not to publicly express their beliefs or orientation.
- persons who reside in Sweden without legal status are exploited in the labour market.

Therefore we encourage each other to

- welcome people, regardless of their origins, who turn up in our parishes.

3. The situation of children must be paid particular attention

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them: for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”
(Mark 10:14)*

*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
(UN Rights of the Child Convention Article 3.1)*

Therefore we want

- the children’s individual reasons for asylum to be taken seriously.
- children who have been in Sweden a long time to be granted residence permits.
- all children without permits to be given the right to attend school.
- children never to be used as interpreters for their parents when serious matters are discussed.

Therefore we encourage each other to

- put the child in focus and especially children who are forced to flee.

4. Families have the right to live together

“And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand”(Mark 3:2)

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (UN Universal Declaration Article 16 (3))

Therefore we want

- people to obtain quick and positive handling of their applications for family reunification.
- relatives of persons residing in Sweden to be given better opportunities to be granted visas for family visits.

Therefore we encourage each other to

- support disunited families

5. Everyone has a responsibility for developing a good society

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned?”
(Mathew 5:13)*

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Mathew 7:12)

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

Therefore we want

- all individuals and actors in society to take responsibility for preventing racism and other discrimination.
- all individuals and social actors to take responsibility for giving people with foreign backgrounds the possibility to become part of general society not least through the labour and housing markets.

Therefore we are critical when

- prejudiced statements are spread about people based on their origins, skin colour or religion.
- that a restrictive asylum and immigration policy is blamed on a “silent opinion” which is said to be against immigration.

Therefore we encourage each other to

- contribute to increasing contacts between, respect for and cooperation with people of different backgrounds.

6. Our goal is peace, justice and sustainable development – “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”
(2 Peter 3:13)

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

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because he has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized” (UN Universal Declaration Article 28)

Therefore we want

- integration to be seen as a mutual process not as assimilation.
- migration policy to be regarded as a part of working for global development, human rights and a sustainable peace.

Therefore we encourage each other to

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



Sveriges Kristna Råd

Christian Council of Sweden

Christian Council of Sweden
SE-172 99 Sundbyberg

Tel +46-8-453 68 00

Fax +46-8-453 68 29

info@skr.org

www.skr.org