



## The Role of Occupational Therapists in the Reception of Newly Arrived Refugees

The Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists believes that the skills of occupational therapists should be utilized to a greater degree both in the reception of refugees, including unaccompanied minors as well as in various supportive efforts, at individual and group level, towards enabling them to become established in Sweden.

The Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists is of the opinion that all people living in Sweden should be entitled to occupational therapy measures as needed and on equal terms, irrespective of their origin or legal status.

In this position statement we wish to make it clear that occupational therapists have skills that should be utilized to a greater extent in relation to the reception of refugees as well as in supportive efforts towards their establishment in society.

### **The current situation poses a threat against the possibility for newly arrived refugees to establish themselves in society**

Asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees often find themselves in circumstances in which everyday activities lack structure and meaningful content. This results in reduced capacity for activity and risks to physical and mental health. In addition, this group has a higher incidence of health-related problems compared with the population as a whole, leading to further risks of limiting their capability to be active in everyday life. This situation poses a threat to establishing newly arrived refugees in working and social life as well as towards equal health.

Research carried out by occupational therapists has also shown that during the asylum-seeking process there is a statistically proven reduction of both activity capacity and self-assessed health. The reception of refugees rarely includes offers of meaningful occupation, nor is it supportive in maintaining or creating habits, routines and roles in everyday life. In order to enable and facilitate means to establish newly arrived refugees, including unaccompanied minors, in society, it is essential to give support to creating and maintaining routines and habits in their daily lives and having something meaningful to do. This places great demands on the relevant competence of staff who meet these people, both regarding reception and occupation.

## **Occupational therapists' contribution to faster establishment in working and social life**

The skills and working methods of occupational therapists can contribute towards helping newly arrived refugees, including unaccompanied minors, to create and maintain structure and meaning in their daily lives, thus enabling them to establish and experience participation and meaningfulness in their new contexts.

Occupational therapists use knowledge-based methods to investigate and assess people's needs and capacity for activity and participation in relation to life circumstances. Occupational therapists can also identify interventions that need to be carried out and evaluated in collaboration with the individuals concerned and other interested parties. Through preventative and health promotional interventions, training and adaptation of both housing and public environments, sometimes with the help of aids, occupational therapists create conditions for people to be active and participate in everyday and social life. In this way, occupational therapists contribute towards preventing ill health and promoting health and well-being.

The Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists holds the opinion that occupational therapy skills should be utilized to a greater extent both in the reception of refugees, including unaccompanied minors, and in various supportive efforts to establish them in society at individual and group levels.

### **We hold the opinion that**

- Occupational therapy skills should be made available in all activities involving reception, occupation and other supportive efforts to facilitate establishing newly arrived refugees in society.
- Occupational therapy skills should be used early in the asylum-seeking process to assess the risk of impaired activity and support the development and maintenance of habits, routines and a meaningful everyday life.
- Occupational therapy skills should be used to create conditions for occupation and adapting organized employment given current varying life circumstances.

Position Statement adopted by the Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists' Board October 11, 2016.