

Education of refugee and asylum-seeking students in Sweden

– rights, obstacles, needs and beyond

Nihad Bunar

Professor, Stockholm University

nihad.bunar@buv.su.se

Sweden as a country of immigration



- 10,3 million inhabitants, about 17% foreign-born, around 26% of all children in Swedish elementary schools are of immigrant origin.
- During the last five years asylum-seekers have mainly come from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea.
- Around 100,000 children have applied for asylum between 2015 and 2019 (41,000 of which were unaccompanied minors).
- Today, about 7 percent of all students in elementary school (age 7-15) are newly-arrived. Unevenly distributed among 290 municipalities.

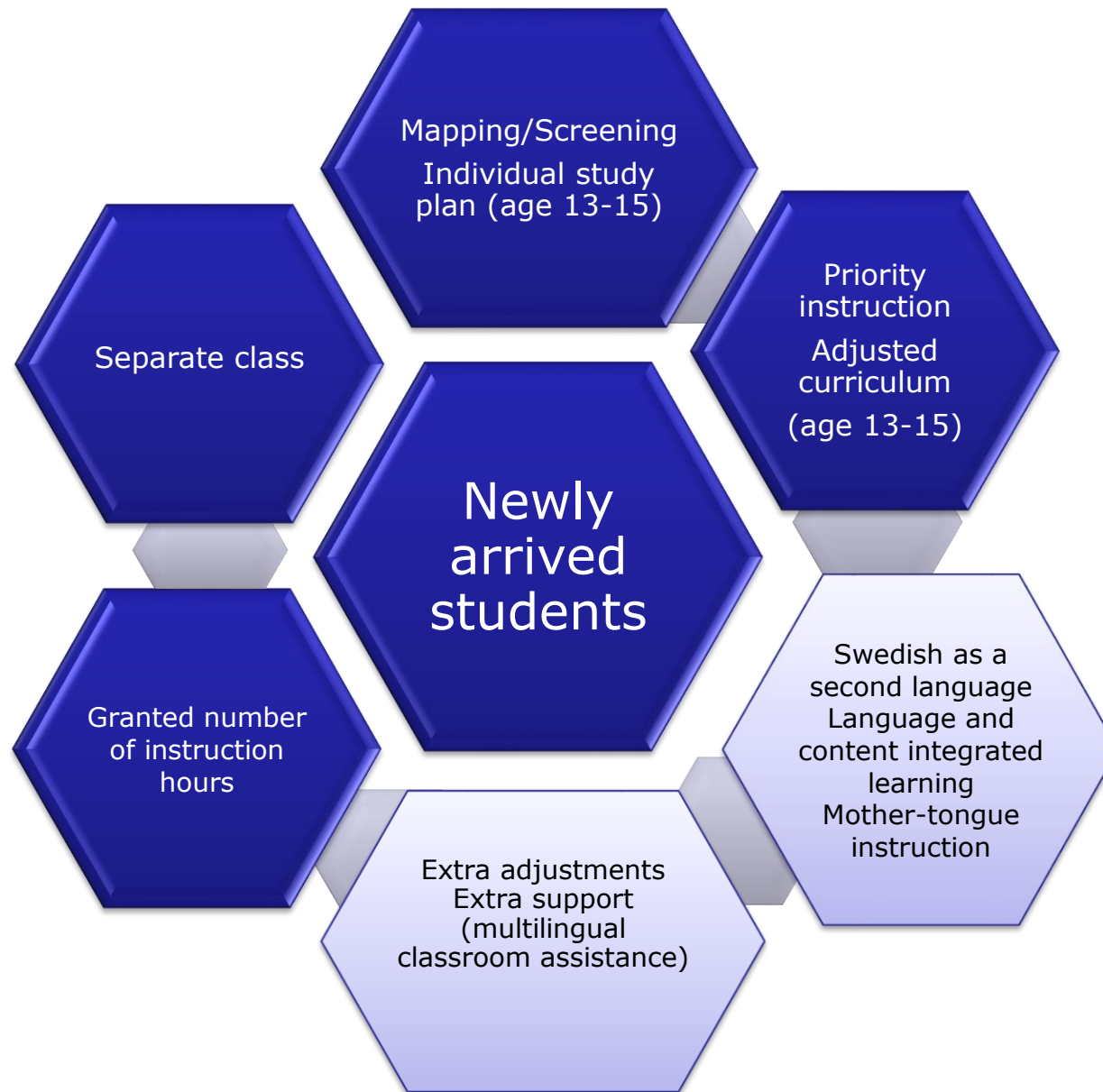
Who is a newly arrived student?



- A newly arrived student is one who had lived abroad, now lives in Sweden, and has arrived to a school after the ordinary school start (age 7).
- A student is considered as newly arrived up to four years after enrolling in a school in Sweden.
- Same rights and obligations as other students, irrespective of migration status. However, the elementary level (age 7-15) is not compulsory for asylum-seeking and undocumented children.

- Newly arrived students, irrespective of their migration status, have right to meaningful and equal education aiming at fully developing personality, talents and abilities of every child. (Bunar, 2019, based on The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Major organizational and pedagogical supporting structures in elementary schools (age 7-15) – an overview



Main obstacles

- A more strict migration policy
- Socio-economic status and institutional regulations
- Lack of understanding among school professionals for the meaning and interconnectedness of support measures
- Cooperation between stakeholders
- Inclusion
- Resources

Rights, needs, obstacles and beyond

- Educational needs cannot be solely reduced to a linguistic issue of a second language acquisition.
- The obstacles cannot be solely located in inadequate and interrupted schooling, the age at a time of migration, real or imagined cultural differences, parents' socio-economic background and educational attainment.
- The rights cannot be solely reduced to legally granted access to schools and they cannot be allowed to remain solely ideological declarations on equity and inclusion.
- Migrant and refugee students bear experiences and a set of previous knowledge that must be recognized and taken as a starting point for their further education.