



## Fact-finding visit to Sweden - December 14-15, 2016

### Report

#### **Visiting Yalla Trappan (Rosengård, Malmö) - Empowering migrant women is an investment for generations to come and leads to a more socially sustainable and democratic society**

Yalla Trappan supports migrant women with no or low education and no prior work experiences. Its core activity is running a lunch restaurant and catering service, utilising all the valuable experiences migrant women have from years of caring and cooking for their families and children. By offering migrant women traineeships and employment in the migrant-dense area of Rosengård, Yalla Trappan helps to break cycles of isolation and exclusion. In doing so, it contributes to a democratic and socially sustainable society. The women learn to value their knowledge and experiences and thus build up their otherwise low self-esteem and confidence. As a result, the women's well-being improves, they get more social contact and are more likely to participate in political elections because now they have a voice, are being heard and believe they too can make a difference.

Christina Merker-Siesjö, President of Yalla Trappan shared her own story of three generations of working class women, to show that the situation of many migrant women she meets through her work is common to the life of her own grandmother; illustrating that it took three generations before she attained a higher education and could provide better living conditions and opportunities for her children. Yalla Trappan has been up and running as a permanent cooperative for six years, following its initial start as a European Social Fund project. Today its activities have expanded, and Yalla's concept and methods is being scaled-up across Sweden. One of the latest cooperation projects is with the Swedish company IKEA; a sewing studio has been set up at IKEA where the migrant women work, and they have also provided IKEA with prototypes for a headscarf to go with their uniforms.

Watch a video of our visit to Yalla Trappan [here](#).

#### **Visiting Merit's parental project (Rosengård, Malmö) - Child carers and industry coaches at a language school remove barriers between migrant parents and the labour market**

Merit is a private company that delivers public services on behalf of Malmö municipality. Its core work is teaching Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and providing coaching. Over four years Merit has been running a European Social Fund project focusing on removing obstacles to employment for women and men on parental leave. Having several children can mean many years of complete exclusion from the labour market and all forms of activation measures offered only to unemployed people (not people on leave). In total the parental project reached 600 students and 1,000 children who voluntarily came to Merit to be able to plan for their individual futures. Merit offered an environment where children were being cared for by a child minder at the premises of the educational centre. For many women it was the first time they were asked what they would like to do in the future and given support to define how to get there. Language teachers also helped the participants to learn better Swedish, and the space enabled them to discuss and receive advice about parenting, and how, for example, pre-schools and education work in Sweden.

Merit employs teachers for its SFI courses and sector-specific coaches. The coaches have work experience in sectors such as hospitality and industry, and play a crucial role in supporting the migrants and teachers alike in understanding what specific professional skills the person possesses. By knowing a sector well, coaches have the necessary networks to find appropriate placements for traineeships that can lead to employment. In one such case, a migrant who lacked the necessary language skills drew a detailed mechanical sketch to illustrate his skill to his teacher and interpreter, but neither of them had the sectorial knowledge to understand; his coach, on the other hand, had significant industry experience and easily identified his

specific field and quickly found him a job. Without the industry coach, this process would have taken much longer.

Watch a video of our visit to Merit's parental project [here](#).

### **Visiting Merit's hotel trainee project (Helsingborg) – Partnership between the hotel sector and the city attracts a qualified workforce and brings migrants into the labour market**

The hotel trainee project started upon the initiative of a hotel manager asking the city of Helsingborg for cooperation, as the hotel sector is always in need of staff and recognises the qualifications and experiences that migrants possess. Merit shared the experiences of some of its participants, among them Zahidah Rashid from Kurdistan, who is a mother of seven children with only four years of educational background. While she had no prior work experience she had extensive practical experience of working on the family's farm. Zahidah was selected for a traineeship within the breakfast and housekeeping services at a hotel, and she was the first of all Merit's trainees to be offered formal employment.

The traineeship programme begins with Merit holding a meeting for interested parties to learn more. An information session usually attracts around 50-60 people. Almost all of those who are interested in the project are later called for an interview, with approximately 15 participants then selected for traineeships. Asking the migrants about their interests involving them in the process of selecting the traineeship gives them ownership over their futures. As a next step, Merit works with the trainees to prepare them for a networking meeting where they will meet the hotel managers; together with Merit's language teachers and industry coaches, the trainees are prepared for these meeting. Individualised qualification plans are set up for each trainee, and Merit follows up with the trainees and hotel management regularly to monitor their development and needs.

The partnering hotels all agree: the migrants that they have had the chance to offer traineeships and employment to would most likely never have had a chance to compete for their jobs the traditional way. Consequently, the hotel would have missed out on a lot of qualified and skilled workers.

Watch a video of our visit to Merit's hotel trainee project [here](#).

### **Visiting Ester Foundation (Helsingborg) – Supporting women with migrant backgrounds to start-up their own businesses**

Ester Foundation was founded by a group of women that learned about microfinancing for women entrepreneurs in India, and who wanted to bring the model to Sweden. Ester Foundation selects women with a migrant background for their programme on the basis of their drive and creativity. The programme lasts 18 months – much longer than normal labour market activities, which normally last around three months. The reason is that these women not only need the skills to start their own businesses, they also need support to build themselves up from the inside. Many of these women have experienced unemployment and marginalisation for a long time, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. The 18 months is divided into three phases: education, developing a business idea, and confidence; registration and start-up; and expanding. Several women participating in the programme shared their experiences.

Once an individual has registered a company they are considered to be self-employed and are no longer eligible for any EU funding. It is therefore challenging for Ester Foundation to argue why these women with a migrant background need additional support during the start-up phase of their business, explained Lena Andersson, Project Manager. Migrant women are discriminated against in areas crucial for starting a business; financially, knowledge-wise, and socially. While Ester Foundation has developed a micro-finance product with Swedbank, it still struggles with being able to offer other support services that these women need, especially in terms of finding mentors within the business sector.

Watch a video of our visit to Ester Foundation [here](#).

## **Meeting local Social Democrat politician Andreas Schönström, Deputy Mayor of Malmö - Integration is the end result of a process, not the first step**

"Integration is part of everything we work with; whether education or transport, it is the end result of a process, not the first step", said Andreas Schönström, Deputy Mayor in Malmö. Malmö is a young city with inhabitants from 177 countries and speaking 150 languages. Malmö's landmark used to be a shipyard employing 8,000 people. In the 90s it closed down and the unemployment rate went from 1.4 percent to 23 percent. Many people left, which led to the empty housing being offered to refugees arriving from former Yugoslavia. Today, the city has managed to replace the shipyard industry with 390 different businesses, making the city more diverse and competitive than ever before. Migrants have rescued companies that otherwise would have left Sweden.

"While there are many jobs in Malmö, the unemployment rate is the highest in Sweden because many of those working in the city do not live here", said Mr Schönström. There is a polarisation between those who are highly skilled in specialist areas and those who lack education entirely. "We lack people falling into the middle of these two groups, and as a consequence migrants are pushed down to do less qualified work, and others who would have taken such low-skilled work are pushed even further down", explained Mr Schönström. This is why Malmö is investing in talent and fast-track programmes. The city has also put in place a Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, and calculated the cost of inequality within the city. In one year (2012), out of 3,217 six-year olds in Malmö it is predicted that 412 of them will not get a job and face a greater risk of becoming socially excluded as a consequence. By the time they turn 65 years old it is estimated that they will have cost society €648,900,000. There is up to six years difference in life expectancy depending on which area of Malmö a person lives.

The Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö recommended the city to establish a social investment policy, applying the same principles as those followed when investing in infrastructure and calculating long-term costs of things like new roads or bridges. The Commission has also proposed new alliances between the public sector, the business community and civil society. Following these suggestions, the city established a Voluntary Sector Organisations Public Partnership – a non-market solution that is about partnership instead of bureaucratic and burdensome project management. It focuses on services that companies do not provide because they are not profitable. Within this framework Yalla Trappan is working in partnership with the city, and current European Social Fund projects could possibly be turned into partnerships once they have ended, such as the parental project run by Merit.

See the [Power Point Presentation by Mr Schönström](#).

## **Meeting local Moderaterna politician Anna Jähnke, Municipal Commissioner of Helsingborg – Each new Swede is welcomed and introduced to Helsingborg, and the city is a platform for individual solutions to deliver jobs for all**

Helsingborg has 140,000 citizens and one-third of them have a non-Swedish background. When the "new Swedes" – as the city refers to refugees and migrants – arrived, politicians were initially unprepared. Ms Jähnke and her colleagues began to work according to a model of the city as a "platform" to introduce each and every new Swede, acknowledging that individual assessments and solutions are needed to identify what each person needs, whether education, a traineeship, or something else. Their aim is job delivery through projects such as Ester Foundation and Merit's hotel trainee projects.