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*Abstract*

**Deportation, Detention and Covid-19 PCR Tests: debates and uncertainties regarding mobility and immobility of young asylum seekers in Sweden**

Prior to the re-orientation in Swedish migration policy in 2015, in response to the refugee crisis, Sweden was one of the main destinations for unaccompanied child refugees. The majority of unaccompanied child-asylum seekers in Sweden came from Afghanistan. For this group the implications of the restrictive turn in policy, together with the time factor making many of them turn adult while waiting for a decision, were two-fold: possibility of detention, and forced deportation. However, carrying out deportation during the ranging global COVID-19 pandemic generated policy debates and dilemmas for the state agencies concerned, as well as a situation of paradoxically both increased pressure *and* increased possible agency for those held in detention centres.

This presentation focuses on the debates and dilemmas surrounding deportation and detention during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on young Afghan migrants in Sweden, as it played out before the Taliban takeover in 2021. On the one hand, those who were to be deported during the pandemic had to show proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test to be allowed into Afghanistan. On the other, those held in detention centres awaiting deportation may not be tested against their will or without their consent. By refusing to take the PCR test, detainees could thus prevent deportation and complicate the enforcement work by the migration agency and the police. Also, Frontex, transit airports and airlines required PCR tests with negative test results to transport the deportees across borders. While the shift in terrain regarding mobility caused by the pandemic has been much emphasized, less attention has been given to how this shift played out among those who were in forced immobility, waiting to be ‘mobiled’, that is, those detained in preparation for deportation. Further, some state agencies argued that the refusal to be tested and thus prevent enforcement of deportation, entailed a blatant abuse of the system, and created pressure on the society; and in the long run also reduced confidence in Swedish migration legislation.

This presentation is based on a large study on former unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Sweden, funded by the Swedish research Council. The study relies on several qualitative methods, including interviews, analysis of social media material and a large number of documents obtained from relevant agencies, the unaccompanied young asylum seekers and members of concerned civil society groups