

WE WANT OUR VOICES TO BE HEARD!

Experiences of disabled migrants in Sweden.
Story telling with photos
- a Photovoice Project of Disabled Refugees
Welcome (DRW)



HOUSING

Limitations:

- too small
- no choice, where to live
- not accessible
- no adaptations
- medical certificates do not help

Hinders us from:

- going out
- studying Swedish
- cooking
- taking a shower
- caring for our children

Leads to:

- isolation
- exclusion
- dependency
- psychological problems
- danger for health

Personal care



” The shower was not adapted to my needs, so my husband had to help. Also, the shower hose was broken, and the water splashed all over the place and the floor became wet and slippery - a big risk to fall. Often I did not take a shower for a week.... and I could not give my daughter a bath.

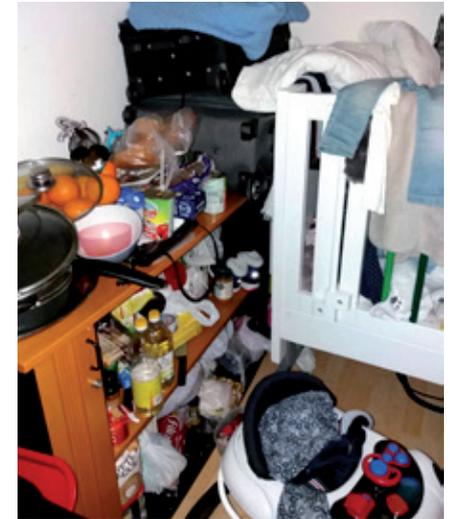


” This is the bathroom. There is a ledge there. When I take a shower, I have to take off my orthosis, which supports my legs. Without it I can't stand and also it is going to be slippery. There is a risk to fall when I take a shower. So, it's discouraging.

Cooking / taking care of children

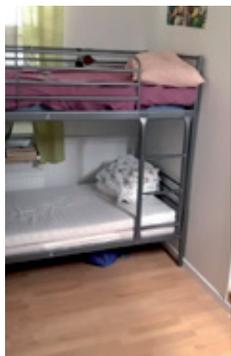


” There is no kitchen, so I must stand to cook. We have to take water from the toilet. I have fallen often. The landlord allows us to make food only twice a week and he is checking his watch. So, I only made food for the baby, otherwise we went to neighbors to cook.



” I am disabled and I have a small baby. We sat in the bed, we ate in the bed, we slept in the bed - everything in the bed....no place for my daughter to play, so it took time for her to start to walk, because she was in the bed all the time.

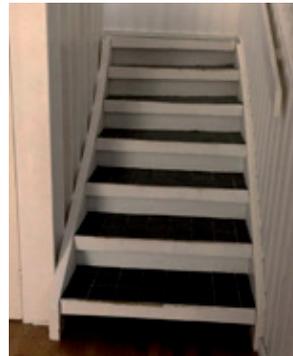
” I got a doctor's certificate (about my housing situation) and I gave it to the municipality, but I did not hear from them.



Design of the house

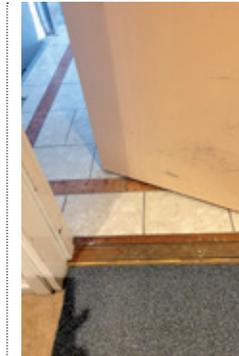
” The space is only enough for a bed. That is the whole room. Two persons living there, we are in the bed day and night.

” I am sleeping by the window, and it gets cold and that gives me severe pain which keeps me from sleeping and then from going to school. Because of that the doctor gave me this paper (certificate for another housing). No answer so far.



” It was not easy to find something, but what I found was a room upstairs in a one family house, that is what I found. And falling in the stairs was normal for me.

” I cannot even take a glass with me. I cannot be independent.



” The door is so heavy to open, it is so difficult, because my hands are not strong. And also, I have a child. They sent an occupational therapist, but they can't make adaptations because I do not have a firsthand contract. There is an automatic door opener from some people living there. But I do not have a remote control.

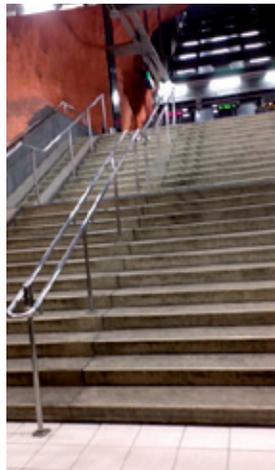
HOUSING continuing

When the doctor saw my bruises and heard about my housing situation, where I was falling down the stairs all the time and hurting myself, she was chocked. She wrote a doctor's certificate. But no one seems to understand me.

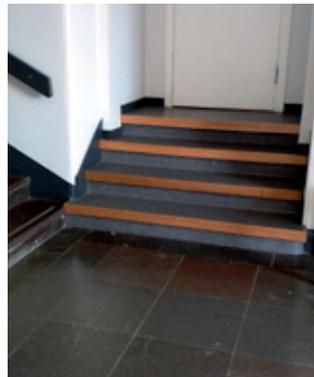
I was searching for an apartment for me and my baby. My occupational therapist and my doctor wrote certificates to prove my need. But the social worker was saying: This is my job, the doctor has his job.

STAIRS, STAIRS, TOO MANY STAIRS

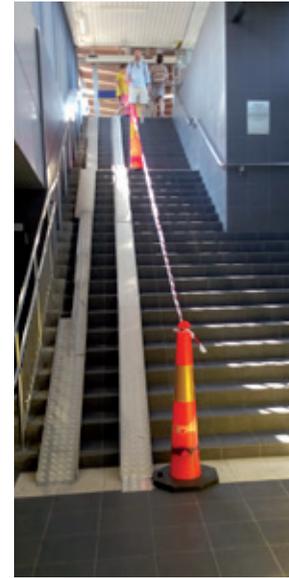
When I came to Sweden, I no longer felt that I had a disability because there are elevators and buses that you actually can take. In Ethiopia, because of my walking ... I am disabled, I can't go very far and can't carry things.



Most of the time, the lift in this place is out of use, and there is only one exit. To leave this station, the only way is take another train and travel to another station, just travel back with this train.tåget.



This picture shows, that in my place, there are stairs after you come out from the elevator. When I go out and go in, I must use these stairs. Because of this, it's difficult to collect my mail every day. And I am not doing the laundry so often. Also, for shopping it's difficult, to walk these stairs and carry things.



Elevator out of order.



I was looking for an apartment and I found one three floors up. But I could not take it, there was no lift.

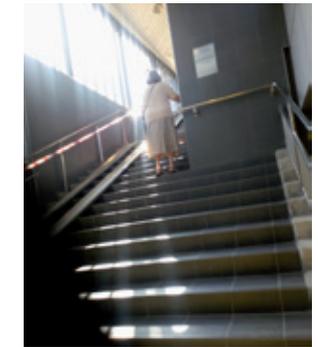


Sometimes you go there, and the escalator is not working. When I come to meetings, and am late, they say 'African time', but sometimes it actually is because of the escalators.



This picture shows my apartment from the outside. To come to the main door, I have to take these stairs, there is no other way. Every time I go there I just get scared - not to talk about winter.

On my way here in one of the stations the elevator was out of order and there was no escalator. So I had to climb the stairs, and when I climbed the stairs, I missed the subway.



I was living on the 2nd floor, not a place where you can go easily out when you want. But when I go out, I go out not only for one purpose, but I collect the purposes ... I was not able to go to Swedish courses for years. I need somebody to help me to go up and down the stairs.

But unfortunately, the elevators and escalators are not always working. And they are not everywhere.

MISUNDERSTANDING? DISCRIMINATION?

Why is it like that, that the people, the Westerners I can say, when they meet us in an informal way on the street, when we need help, they are just devoted to help us, to listen to us, to help in different ways. But when we go to their work (to the authorities), they are completely different, that surprises me... Why don't these people listen, when they are in the office? When we go to the office, they are not listening. I don't understand.

Is it because they don't know better?
Is it because they don't want to?
Is it because of their rules?
Is it because we are disabled?
Is it because we are black?



In the accommodation

” In the accommodation, I got the upper bunk bed. When I told them, I can't climb up, they did not listen to me. They asked for a medical certificate..

” I got the upper bunk. They sent me to different rooms, but in all of them only the upper beds were available. But I had a talk with the people who were sleeping in the bottom bunk, and they were willing to change with me.



In the transport service

When you sit in the front seat, you have to use the right hand to close the door (which I am not able to). Mostly, the drivers don't help me. They don't expect me to need help. When I am trying to close with my left hand, I lose my balance and I just fall down. This is a daily experience for me. The drivers only take action to help me when something happens, not before that.

On the escalator

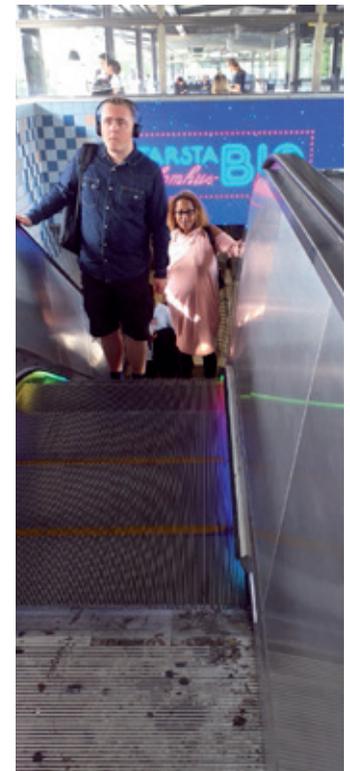
” I can go up (an escalator), but I have to hold on with my left hand and block the way for somebody who wants to pass. Sometimes, people just push me away and are angry, because my disability is not like, that they can see it. Sometimes, when I say, that I have a problem with my balance, they say oj ... others just say, who cares, why don't you use the elevator. When they get upset, I just say, ok, let them be.

In a café

” I was treated badly in a café I used to go to. The café is run by a husband and his wife. The husband is treating me very well, but not the wife, even if I am paying. She is not treating me like other customers and she even gives me a different glass, which is not clean and which is a kind of cup - not for customers.

In the pub

” They refused to let me in the pub. It's just like that, when they see a black man.



LIGHT BETWEEN THE DARKNESS

☞ I had a lot of problems, I was alone. I was so far away from the friends I had. I did not know anybody ... it's difficult to socialize with the people here. When I feel loneliness, I am walking around in the forest. We lost self-confidence.

☞ There is snow in K., so it's difficult with a walker. It was a big challenge in my life, that time. I was getting stuck all the time and I was just waiting until somebody came to help.

☞ To get the local bus you must walk for 45 minutes. One time I was called to an interview (regarding asylum), and I asked for a ride from the migration camp, because they have a car. But they said, we have to go to S, so they just left me and went. I was not able to walk this distance (to the bus stop). They never listened. Three times I missed the interview because of that. I don't know where to go, to complain.

☞ The asylum process is very unstable. I was placed in a lot of different places, sometimes for one month, sometimes for two weeks. Different places, sometimes like a camp, sometimes a hotel, I even was in an emergency accommodation. They put me in a hotel for three years. They put me together with alcoholics and drug abusers. They sent me up north to P. And I told them, I have an internship, I am doing an internship here. They should put me in a municipality closer to here, so that I can go to the internship, that can lead to a job and I can be independent, but they did not listen to me..

☞ I have to leave my apartment in one month, I have nowhere to go, I don't get an answer. There is one problem after another. It's difficult to plan, to think about the future, I don't not know what will happen. Also, because of my disability it's difficult to look for apartments. I don't know what to do. Medical certificates don't help, they don't listen. I want to go to school and look for a job, but I cannot. Instead of thinking what I want to do, what I want to work with, whether I want to meet somebody, I am just thinking, what will happen tomorrow, where will they put me? How will all this end?

☞ Everything is black for me. I can't think, can't plan. I have difficulties with my memory, the brain is not functioning..

☞ It's surprising me. The problems are very similar, and we are in different places and are suffering. Why is this so? Why don't they solve the problems?

☞ When I look at the birds and the flash of the sunlight, I am reminded that there are bright times. And the bird means peace and hope.

☞ I will not give up, it's good to have a hope. I fight. I never give up. I keep going everywhere, explaining my problem. I am telling it to many people. Some of them might listen.

SOCIAL LIFE



” I wanted to take a picture of a group of people and I sitting alone.

” At home, it's difficult to feel loneliness, at home it is not a problem. But here I feel it. Here it's obvious.

” This is when I really enjoy Stockholm, because I know most of the people who come, and it's a very cheap pub and people come and really talk!

” This picture makes you relaxed and shows self-confidence, it gives a feeling of freedom.



” This is a traditional food that you usually eat it in a group, typically during pregnancy or nursing time..

” Exchanging common experience with others gives a lot of confidence and strength.



About the exhibition

During summer and autumn of 2019, a group of disabled migrants met on several occasions to talk about life as a disabled migrant in Sweden. For each meeting they decided upon a relevant topic, and between the meetings they took photos which highlighted the chosen topics. Those pictures were the basis for discussion and dialogue. With the pictures they decided to make an exhibition and together agreed on topics, picture selection, texts and the design of the exhibition.

The exhibition is the result of a Photovoice project that was carried out by DRW, a project of Independent Living Institute in Stockholm. The project will also be published as a scientific article.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory research method, where participants are experts on their own life. They use photographs to tell stories to document and visualize their daily life. Photos and stories about issues important to the participants are processed in the group and can be used for an exhibition, a book or in homepages.

Participants:

Helen A,
Lili A,
Aster G
Kifle G
Eyas G

Mahlet N
Julius N
Sara M

Facilitators:

Rahel Abebaw Atnafu
(DRW fieldworker and translator)
Jamie Bolling
(director of ILI, project leader DRW)
Dorothee Riedel, Occupational Therapist