



Problem Identification Workshop Report

Location KTH Library, Salongen

Date October 28th, 3.00 PM

Attendees 7 members of Refugee Tech team, 42 participants, including 3 journalists



About this document

The following is a report for the **problem identification workshop** held by Refugee Tech at KTH Library in Salongen on October 28, 2015. Attending this workshop were governmental representatives, tech people, social actors, journalists and entrepreneurs who share an interest in addressing the myriad of issues facing refugees today. Refugee Tech welcomed 40 attendees and its team moderated the 4 hours of in depth discussion of these problems. The purpose of this report is to share results from the workshop, including insights and next steps.

Note: If you attended this workshop, please skip to section 2.2.



1. Context

In the first step of Refugee Tech's process, we invite those in fields of relevant expertise and experience to help identify the challenges that newcomers face after arriving to Sweden. This is the essence of the workshop, attended by 40 experts working in government, healthcare, technology, recruiting, housing, social work, non-profit organizations, psychology, and several others.

2. The workshop proceedings

The workshop began with a presentation of Refugee Tech, our vision and our process. The first step is problem identification, which forms the foundation upon which we can carry on and build upon future work. We will subject the problems identified in the workshop to a crowdsourced validation before focusing on potential solutions to these problems. From there, we invite the tech people to begin to come up with plausible ideas before a hackathon, where they are asked to present their solutions. After the hackathon¹, the best solutions will go through an open source development phase that will ultimately result in final products and/or services.

After Refugee Tech's presentation, Natalie Sial spoke about some of the issues that the government has identified.

The workshop then followed a three-step process to identify and discuss the issues that refugees face. We describe this three-step process in sections that follow.

2.1. Step 1: Identification of problem categories & establishment of groups

Based on previous research carried out by Refugee Tech team members, the issues newcomers face in Sweden can be divided into several categories. The proposed categories are: Social issues, Bureaucracy, Housing, Education & Languages and Employment. The participants in the workshop have identified further categories such as Coordination and Healthcare. Participants were asked to categorize themselves as experts in one of those groups before the workshop progressed to the next two steps.

2.2. Step 2: In-depth discussion of problems within categories

At this point in the workshop, participants broke out into groups for in-depth discussions focusing on the areas in which they had particular expertise. The outcomes of these discussions and the backgrounds of the experts involved are listed below under the categories that were identified in step 1.

¹For those non-familiar with the term Hackathon ([Click here](#)).

Social Issues

Experts: social insertion, social health, healthcare.

- There is a need for effective meeting spaces. Different associations need to hold cooperative meetings as well as to meet with people interested in helping newcomers. Meeting places can also be a way for organizations to meet the newcomers themselves.
- Swedish people generally believe the burden of integrating newcomers to be on the newcomers themselves or on the organizations providing assistance.
- There is an issue of hidden finance². It can be very difficult for new organizations and cooperations to find information about potential funding opportunities for their efforts.
- Newcomers do not have access to enough information about Swedish society.

Information

Experts: governance, data science, immigration issues.

- Information must be digital, rigorous and up to date. It should be easy for newcomers to understand and access necessary information.
- There is not enough information available for newcomers to navigate and understand the housing market.
- People in refugee camps need to have Wi-Fi and reliable internet services.

Language and Education

Experts: research, teaching, translation, technology.

- There are a lot of different languages people are starting from when they learn Swedish. Some of these languages have different dialects that make it more difficult to learn Swedish, such as different Arabic dialects or less common languages like Kurdish.
- There is a lack of basic education for newcomers to learn about Swedish society.
- There is a mismatch between the level of education a newcomer receives and the kind of Swedish teaching they get.

² Hidden Finance: There are a lot of organisations who want to fund humanitarian initiatives, but they are not easy to find.

- The municipalities do not have the ability or resources they need to make learning Swedish accessible for all newcomers.
- The process of learning a language should be more fun, interactive, positive and social.
- Refugees are not very included in the society, making it hard for them to learn at a rapid pace.
- There is a need to motivate refugees to learn the language.
- There is a lack of schools and teachers in some communes.

Employment

Experts: Head of local business, students, employment providers.

- Finally arriving:
 - The time at refugee camps is not well spent. During the time newcomers spend in camps, they do not engage in the kinds of activities that relate to their competencies or ambitions. There are no opportunities for them to learn new skills.
 - During their time at the camps, refugees do not have opportunities to network with new contacts. This is especially dire with the knowledge that 80% of new hires come from personal contacts and networking³.
- Settling in Sweden:
 - The Swedish labor market is not adequately seeking diversity. Diversity is not yet seen as a potential but rather as a threat.
 - There are illegal moneymaking opportunities that attract jobless newcomers faced with a hard road to gainful employment.
- Enabling potential:
 - There is no guidance for newcomers to gain a full understanding of the Swedish labor market.
 - Some refugees settle for jobs for which they are over-qualified. This problem in particular can have a devastating effect on their

³ According to one of the participants. We found the following Forbes article that has a similar statement ([Click here](#)).

Coordination

Experts: Head of local business, students, employment providers.

- There is a lack of coordination between people who want to help newcomers. Communication is needed between organizations, business, private people and refugees to better facilitate services.
- Different organizations are doing the same things but do not delegate to each other. Better communication and distribution of tasks would make deployment of solutions more effective.
- There is not enough communication between organizations providing services and the newcomers they want to assist.
- The government is overwhelmed at many levels.

Job & Housing

Experts: housing, social work, employers.

- There is a shortage of housing available to newcomers.
- There is a geographic disconnect between where jobs are located versus where housing can be found.
- The current housing systems for immigrant children were established in 2006, and can only accommodate 400 children per year, on a communal basis. The existing system is outdated and cannot meet current needs⁴.
- Educational degrees earned outside of Sweden are not generally recognized.
- The skills of refugees do not match their Swedish peers.
- There is no arrival process for newcomers by which they could be interviewed and/or tested for their skills.
- Some newcomers need additional incentives to look for a job and/or learn new skills because of the money they receive during their first year.
- Even when refugees' skills are identified, they are not notified or informed of potential jobs for which they are qualified.
- There is no mechanism to connect refugees who have specific skills with employers looking for those precise abilities.

⁴ The number is according to a participant with a background in jobs and IT.

2.3. Step 3: In-depth discussion of problems within categories

The third stage of the process was to consider the problems that had been identified under the categories identified in step one to determine whether any of them could be linked to other categories. This process helps both to identify bottlenecks and to establish where problems are most crucial to solve.

- Some groups working to provide solutions to these problems struggle with lack of resources and/or financing.
- Incentives can help encourage newcomers, who often do not feel useful, to adapt more quickly to Swedish values and processes.
- Information about Swedish society, history and values is not always readily available.
- The problem of segregation is one that should be fought inside Swedish society as well; most people aren't aware that diversity is a great opportunity.
- Often problems are going larger than solutions can be developed. There is a need for scalability.
- The burden of this work is put most heavily on NGOs. There is a need for private and public companies to step up in this work as well.
- There is not enough engagement with newcomers (three groups shared this conclusion).
- At times, organizations do not think outside their own circle of interest at the bigger picture.
- Refugees are not involved enough in either the process or the solution (four groups shared this conclusion).

Several participants in the workshop noted that information and coordination seem to be the thread that connects all the previously-identified categories⁵.

3. What can we deduce?

Some obstacles came up over and over again from several people regardless of their backgrounds. This indicates that those obstacles are bottlenecks for different areas simultaneously, mainly:

- We need better communication with and by refugees. Newcomers do not receive enough information upon arrival to become familiar with Swedish values. There needs to be tailored information for newcomers in order to introduce them to Swedish society and communicate some resources and information.

⁵ Four different groups reached this conclusion.

- On the other hand, the rest of society does not often receive information about the skills, needs or preferences of newcomers. Every day people, organizations and the people who want to help refugees need access to this information to properly address their real needs. This lack of communication sometimes renders the initiatives taken on to solve current issues irrelevant and useless.
- The coordination poses a big obstacle. Many societal actors want to improve the reality of the refugee crisis, but better coordination would yield better results.
- We can not know anything true about the lived experiences and daily reality of newcomers without their direct involvement and inclusion.
- Latent potential in the refugee camps is not recognized or cultivated. Solutions can harness the abilities and be adaptive to the variety in newcomers' backgrounds. It is vital to better understand the refugee situation in order to come up with relevant solutions.
- Swedish society has not yet risen up to tackle the issues newcomers face.

These are the issues that were mentioned over and over again, and they need special attention. That does not mean that the other issues are less important, rather that fixing the ones outlined above might have the most immediate positive impact, and will make solving some of the other problems easier. For example, having an information platform in place can help people find the relevant information to provide reasonable solutions.

4. What are we doing next?

What do we do with this extensive list? As noted in the workshop, the problems have no meaning unless they relate to refugees directly. Taking that into account, Refugee Tech is going to proceed with these issues using some crowdsourcing techniques to better involve refugees and people that are in contact with refugees. The goal behind this approach is to further explore, validate and prioritize the problems using data from the ground. Once that is done, tech people and problem solvers will have the chance to come up with potential solutions until late January 2016. A hackathon will then take place to develop the solutions and present them to the world.

The crowdsourcing is going to be carried out based on research and science. It will also be visually simple. Our crowdsourcing process is designed to be as easy as possible for everyone to identify and suggest new problems. The results of the crowdsourcing will be available to the general public.

5. Immediate consequences on Refugee Tech

Refugee Tech has already identified coordination as problem of great concern for the organizations and people who want to help refugees. Refugee Tech has taken a holistic approach from the beginning and aims to include as many people as possible. We are trying to get different organizations and social actors to sit at the same table in order to pinpoint the issues that exist, validate them with refugees and people on the ground and ultimately generate solutions. We will be having a *Problem Hub* with all of the problems we have identified in this report. We will also be holding a *Project Hub* where existing projects of refugee services get to connect to each other and share expertise and advice. The projects will also have direct access to resources according to their needs.

6. Conclusions

The workshop successfully identified many of the key problems refugees face in across society. The combination of different expertise and backgrounds succeeded in identifying the problems that the newcomers face from their arrival until they are settled definitively in Sweden. If there is a conclusion to be drawn, it would be that there is a need for active cooperation to tackle all the existing issues. There is no way to gain a deep understanding of these problems without communicating with other actors. Some of the stand-alone solutions are outdated, insufficient, and even irrelevant.

Serious issues require swift action, but premature solutions often forget the complexity of a situation. Refugee Tech found a compromise to deliver solutions that are equal parts fast, efficient, and sustainable.

We are still deciding our next steps. Our plans will be announced via the appropriate [slack](#)⁶ channel. The hackathon will be organized in February 2016. Meanwhile, several workshops will be organized to further explore these issues and to develop new, innovative methods.

⁶ Slack is a digital team collaboration tool - contact info@refugeetech.com to join our Slack channel.