THE INTEGRATION CHALLENGES OF SWEDEN

ABSTRACT

Over the last 40 years, Swedish legislation on acquiring citizenship has undergone various reforms. Since the mid-1970s, the integration policy of Sweden has been based on cultural pluralism and guidelines of equality, freedom of choice and partnership. This historical overview of immigration in Sweden is followed by a broader look at policy, modern migration, asylum and admission status, integration strategies, citizenship and economic integration.

Since the middle of the 1980s, increasing numbers of asylum seekers have been looking for protection in numerous European countries. Like many of its neighbouring states, Sweden has been affected by this dramatic increase in refugee movement worldwide. The large inflow of people seeking refuge during the 1980s and 1990s, together with a gradual lower employment integration of immigrants during these decades, has provoked a debate about immigration and integration policies in Sweden. The deep economic recession of the early 1990s obviously fuelled this attention and directed it particularly towards the economic adjustment of immigrants and refugees.

Modern migration

A simplified view of immigration to Sweden divides the post-war period into two distinct periods, the first primarily characterized by labour-force immigration, and the second by a shift towards refugee and "tied" immigration. The first period is usually said to have begun after World War II and ended in the first half of the 1970s. During this time, Sweden's economy expanded rapidly, partly due to the reconstruction of her neighbouring countries after World War II. Accordingly, labour shortages were solved in the 1950s through the import of skilled labour, migrating from North-Western Europe, mainly Nordic countries, which served to complement the native labour force.

But the 1960s saw the beginnings of a rationalization phase in the Swedish economy, with the type of labour being sought shifting towards unskilled or low-skilled workers. Labour force immigrants during this decade came largely from Nordic countries but also from Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey.

By the end of the 1960s, however, the situation began to change for immigrants. The trade unions began to view immigration as producing a number of negative side effects. Delaying of industrial transformation through the steady supply of workers and depressing wages were the main arguments. The government responded to these criticisms and from 1968 future applicants for work and residence permits from non-Nordic countries had to apply before they entered the country, and at the same time arrange both for a job and a place to live. Over the next decades, this dramatically cut down on labour immigration originating from non-Nordic countries.

In the early 1970s, Swedish economic growth dropped to a lower level following the oil-crisis. Nordic labour migration – especially Finnish – gradually declined, mainly because of a diminishing gap in the standard of living between Sweden and Finland, and an increasing demand for labour in Finland. While labour migration dwindled during the 1970s, and more significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, other types of migration started to increase. These new groups were predominantly family reunion migrants and various categories of refugees, with a greater share of non-European immigrants. In the 1970s, the major contributors to the immigrant population in Sweden were primarily refugees from Chile, Poland and Turkey. In the 1980s, the lion's share of this new immigration came from Chile, Ethiopia, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Individuals from Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe countries dominated the 1990s. In 2005, Sweden's foreign-born population numbered over 1.1 million and represented 12.3% of the total population.

Asylum and admission status

Like many other countries, the Swedish refugee policy is based on the UN Geneva Convention of 1951 which Sweden signed in 1954, and established in the *Swedish Alien Act* of 1989. Formally,

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Sweden gives asylum to one category of refugees only, the so-called "convention refugees." Sweden cooperates with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and admits its share of "quota refugees," who are asylum seekers who often arrive directly from a refugee camp and who have not individually entered the country. The size of the quota is decided upon yearly by the Swedish government and in agreement with the UNHCR.

However, since 1954 there has been a wider interpretation than the Geneva Convention, creating an established practice that has enabled a new group of refugees to obtain permanent residence in Sweden as "*de facto* refugees" or as "war-rejecters." *De facto* refugees are individuals who can refer to political conditions or other circumstances in their country of origin that weigh heavily in support for claiming asylum. War-rejecters are individuals who have fled war or impending military service. Since 1997 a new category has been created, called "refugees in need of sanctuary," including individuals with "refugee-like" reasons, such as mass flight situations due to environmental catastrophes or civil war, and individuals who fear risk of persecution due to their gender or sexuality, which mainly includes the earlier *de facto* refugees. Individuals can also obtain a permanent residence for humanitarian reasons, a state of war in their home country, for example. In addition, the Swedish government also has the possibility to grant temporary protection to individuals.

Like many other European countries, Sweden has seen an increase in the number of asylum seekers in the second half of the 1980s, peaking in 1993. Since then it dropped and increased again in the early new century. The general trend in this period was that over 50% of all asylum seekers are accepted for humanitarian reasons. The number of convention refugees as well as the number who have gained asylum as *de facto* refugees or in need of protection decreased in real numbers and in percentage in this same period. Among those who got asylum/residence permit, the humanitarians increased but other categories decreased. Over time, family reunification immigration increased. Almost 50% of all non-Nordic immigrants who gained a residence permit in Sweden between 1980 and 2001 were of this category. To some extent, this increase is due to the entrance of Sweden into the EES/EU in 1994-1995. Almost 25% of those who gained access to Sweden as family reunification migrants were connected to an individual who had a residence permit based on refugee status in some other European country.

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Integration strategies

Earlier, it was claimed that immigrants were warmly welcomed until the mid-1960s, when Sweden still advocated a liberal migration policy due to its labour shortage. However, there was no clear political objective as to how immigrants and refugees should be integrated until the mid-1970s. The main goal of the policy was to assimilate the immigrants as quickly as possible and to authorize residence permits, often permanent; these measures were heavily related to existing labour demands. A more distinct integration policy is discernible in the late 1960s, when a more restrictive immigration policy was implemented simultaneously. In 1965, the first steps were taken to facilitate the adaptation of immigrants to the Swedish society. These measures were taken through an initiative by LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation) and SAF (the Swedish Employers Confederation), and consisted mainly of education in the Swedish language, but also of general information about Sweden in several foreign languages, and the establishment of immigrant offices. In the early 1970s, further initiatives were taken to alleviate the increasing need Swedish language instruction for immigrants. This led to legislation in 1972, in which immigrants obtained the right to paid leave of absence by the employer in order to study Swedish for a minimum of 240 hours.

Since the middle of the 1970s, a policy of ethnic or cultural pluralism was implemented based on three pillars: equality, freedom of choice and partnership. Equality reflects a fundamental principle of the Swedish welfare state, and in the context of immigration it rejected the guest worker system. Immigrants were to enjoy the same social and economic rights and standards as native Swedes. Freedom of choice reflects the idea that individuals determine their personal and cultural affiliations and identities to the Swedish society. Partnership can be seen as the need for mutual tolerance and solidarity between immigrants and native Swedes. In 1998, the immigration policy was replaced by an integration policy aimed at the whole population, and a new central government agency, the Integration Board (*Integrationsverket*), was established with the special task of overseeing integration efforts throughout the Swedish society. The focus of this new organization is to monitor and evaluate trends in integration, promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone, and combat xenophobia, racism and discrimination.

Another watershed can be dated to the mid-1980s when Sweden reorganized its refugee reception program. Before this reform, a majority of refugees travelled directly to a municipality and applied for asylum there. A vast majority arrived in the regions of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. The National Immigration Board (*SIV-Statens Invandrarverk*) took over primary responsibility from the National Labour Market Board (*AMS-Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen*). The main principles of this new reorganization were that refugees should enjoy the benefits of Sweden's integration policy in the same way as

other immigrants. Asylum seekers and refugees should be placed in a municipality as soon as possible and obtain education in the Swedish language and society as well as housing and social benefits according to "general" Swedish standards. A selection of municipalities suitable for the integration of refugees should be made and the State should pay for the costs of the integration program as well as the fixed costs for the asylum seeker or refugee, including housing costs and social benefits during the first three years.

In practice, an individual could seek asylum directly at the border, or later at the local police station in the municipality where they chose to stay. The police, who forwarded the matter to the Swedish Immigration Board for further investigation, held the first hearing. The Board was further responsible for the reception of the asylum seeker, who at first was placed at one of the four clearance centres. Due to the waiting time for a residence permit, the asylum seeker could be placed in a more permanent refugee camp facility or stay with relatives while waiting for a residence permit. The latter had to be approved by the municipality and the Immigration Board. Non-approval by these authorities could lead to the loss of financial support for the asylum seeker. Until 1990, the only activities for refugees in the refugee camps were language instruction and courses on Swedish society. During 1991, more compulsory activities were allowed encompassing at least four hours a day. In 1992, it was decided to allow asylum seekers to work if the waiting time on a residence permit was estimated to take at least four months. The main idea behind these organized activities was to counteract passivity and to increase the possibilities of integration after a resident permit was obtained. In the end, the focus of the activities became more a sort of "contribute to your own support" than an actual effort towards integration into Swedish society. These activities could be anything from cleaning the camp, being an assistant in a day-care centre, holding information meetings for new asylum seekers, organizing theatre groups, producing newspapers, or taking different kinds of courses (language, computer knowledge, civics, etc.). Work outside the refugee camp has been less than 20% of the total supply of activities. The main activity here has been trainee places which are strongly influenced by the economic situation in the local labour market. Increasing competition for trainee places by the indigenous population during this period could explain this low percentage for asylum seekers.

The Swedish Immigration Board was responsible for the transfer of the refugee to the municipalities once a residence permit was obtained. The board also had the responsibility of negotiating with municipalities for the settlement of refugees. The municipality involved could reapply for social grants from the State during the refugees' first three years in the municipality and also receive a once-only compensation for each refugee received, aimed at covering extra costs. The integration responsibilities of the municipality include housing, language courses, and an introduction plan with the focus on how to reach self-sufficiency. During the 1985-1990 period, municipalities were reimbursed for their actual expenditures. Since 1991, however, municipalities are given a standard reimbursement per received refugee.

This reform never functioned in its original form and was not a success. This was mainly due to the sharp increase of refugees granted a residence permit in Sweden during this period which in turn increased the waiting time for a resident permit and the following settlement in the municipality. Also, during these years, the number of municipalities involved in settlement increased, even including those with less suitable labour market conditions. This policy is still in effect although refugees since the 1990s are allowed to move freely within the country and decide where they would like to live.

Since the early 1970s, there has been an increasing negative gap in immigrant employment rates for both men and women compared to the native-born. The deep economic recession of the early 1990s further widened the gap between native- and foreign-born, whereas the economic recovery of the late 1990s and early new millennium seems to have reversed the negative development to some extent.

Citizenship

Citizenship in Sweden is based on the *jus sanguinis* principle. Children of non-Swedish citizens, although born in Sweden, are not automatically entitled to Swedish citizenship. Over the last 40 years, Swedish legislation on citizenship has undergone various reforms. The main reforms were that Nordic citizens obtained special conditions and that the years of uninterrupted residence changed substantially, from ten to five years for non-Nordic-born and only two years for Nordic-born, making Swedish legislation on naturalization one of the most liberal in Europe.

Generally, since the mid-1970s, the official Swedish legislation on obtaining citizenship by naturalization is that foreign citizens can gain Swedish citizenship after five years of residence in Sweden, while refugees can do so after four years. Citizens from other Nordic countries are exceptions to this rule and can obtain citizenship after two years of residence in Sweden. Other preconditions for gaining Swedish citizenship include the "age condition," which means that the applicant must be 18 years of age or

older, and the absence of a criminal record. Gaining citizenship by notification is also possible. This is basically a simplified juridical naturalization procedure and mainly used by Nordic citizens. Acquiring Swedish citizenship by notification is possible if the applicant meets the following requirements: he or she is 18 years of age or older, has lived in Sweden for five years and has not been sentenced to prison during this time. In Table 1, the most frequent citizenship changes by naturalization in the 2000-2004 perdiod are shown.

While the acquisition of Swedish citizenship has become increasingly easier, there was one important formal deterrent. Dual citizenship was forbidden in Sweden until July 1, 2001. Many individuals may see uptake of a citizenship as a fairly casual act, but renunciation of a citizenship is much more serious. Prior to 2001, dual citizenship was only allowed in those cases where individuals were citizens of countries that did not allow renunciation of citizenship. After 2001, no such demands were placed on applicants. According to the latest official estimations by the Migration Board, 275,000 individuals have dual citizenship in Sweden.[1]

Table 1
Citizenship changes by naturalization (2000-2004)

Former citizenship country	Number naturalized 2000-2004
Bosnia-Herzegovina	24,428
Iraq	21,732
Serbia-Montenegro	14,395
Iran	8,817
Somalia	8,816
Turkey	8,228
Poland	6,337
Croatia	4,274
Syria	4,077
Lebanon	2,498

Source: SOU 2006: 2 (State Official Publications).

Table 2
Employment rate (%) among Swedish-born and selected groups of foreign-born men and women, aged between 25-60, 2003

Country of birth	Male	Female
Sweden	85	82
Denmark	60	67
Norway	62	69
Finland	71	74
Germany	70	68
Greece	54	41
Italy	61	61
Yugoslavia	62	52
Bosnia-Herzegovina	71	65
Poland	65	64
Romania	68	65
Hungary	64	64
Turkey	60	45
Lebanon	52	36
Syria	57	41
Chile	69	64
Iran	59	52
Iraq	39	29
Ethiopia	60	63

Source: Author's calculations based on register data collected by Statistics Sweden.

Economic integration

Studies on the socio-economic integration of immigrants in Sweden show a very high labour market attachment during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, incomes and employment rates were relatively high, with consequently low unemployment rates. Research on the employment situation of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, however, shows a different picture. During the 1970s and 1980s, the unemployment rate was quite low in Sweden compared to most other OECD countries. Gradually, since the early 1970s, there has been an increasing negative gap in immigrant employment rates for both men and women compared to the native-born. The deep economic recession of the early 1990s further widened the gap between native- and foreign-born, whereas the economic recovery of the late 1990s and early new millennium seems to have reversed the negative development to some extent.

In 2003, (see Table 2) the employment rate among foreign-born men from Finland, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania and Chile was close to 70%, while foreign-born men from Poland, former Yugoslavia, Ethiopia and Middle Eastern countries like Turkey, Iran and Iraq were below this level. The lower levels observed for Norway and Denmark can be attributed to immigrants who live in Sweden but commute to their country of origin, where they are employed (these persons were not accounted as employed in Sweden).

The employment rate for foreign-born women reach higher levels among Nordic-born and German women. Somewhat lower employment levels are found among women from East-European countries, Chile, Italy, but also Ethiopia. Women from Middle Eastern countries have the lowest levels.

Variations in employment adjustment have been partly explained by "time of residence" and partly by the motivation for migration. The change in country of origin mix, however, cannot by itself explain the lower employment adjustment for immigrants in general. Nor can it account for the differences in employment integration between immigrant groups.

The differences in educational levels could be the main variable accounting for differences in the employment integration of immigrants groups in the Swedish labour market. Several studies based on individual data basically point to the same conclusion, namely that a higher educational level increases the probability of obtaining employment for both immigrants and natives between 1970 and 1990. A Swedish degree also betters one's employment opportunities than does a foreign degree, but variations in educational levels do not fully explain the differences in the chances of obtaining employment, neither by itself nor together with other individual characteristics.

Other studies suggest that institutional and demand-side factors, not only supply-side factors, may help to explain the varying labour market attachment, which for some immigrant groups may be characterized as very weak. First, a lower level of economic growth was experienced during the last two decades compared to the earlier period, entailing a decreasing demand for "extra" labour. Second, on the aggregate level, there has been a structural change of the economy, where a declining industry sector has given way to an increasing service sector, which requires higher education and language proficiency. This means that the number of low-skilled industry jobs (traditionally filled by immigrants) has been decreasing steadily in recent years. Third, policies pertaining to immigration, integration and the labour market, as mentioned earlier, have influenced the labour market integration of immigrants on entry and long afterwards. Fourth, more information- and communication-intensive working processes were introduced in both the industrial and the service sectors of the economy. This development increased the demand for employees with higher levels of general competence, while unskilled labour was made redundant by efficiency improvements. One effect of this increased demand for general competence has been to increase the importance of informal skills without reducing the importance of formal education and skills. Such informal skills include country-specific skills, for instance language skills, and the understanding of different behaviour in teamwork and in relations with authorities and labour market organizations worldwide. This structural change made it more difficult for immigrants with the same general formal human capital stock than Swedes to obtain employment and earnings on the level as natives. Together with the shift in immigration towards what is perceived as culturally more distant from the Swedish society, this structural change may have resulted in more discrimination by authorities, employers and employees towards the new immigrants.

This lack of employment integration has in turn had negative effects on the relative income of the various immigrant groups. Due to the fact that unemployment benefits, parental leave and various pensions are based on earlier income, immigrants also have weaker welfare inclusion. Self-employment among some groups has partially counteracted the situation, but the social security payments directed towards certain immigrant groups show a harsh reality and a strong exclusion from the labour market.

The economic crisis of the early 1990s and the dramatic increase of asylum seekers during the same period paved the way for adjusting the refugee policy towards a more restrictive attitude, where temporary protection of asylum seekers replaced what formerly would have been the authorization of permanent residence permits.

Concluding remarks

Studying the immigration experience in Sweden diachronically shows that migration, as well as integration into the labour market, and the spatial patterns of settlement of the newly arrived immigrants have changed over time. A majority of the immigrants who came to Sweden in the first decades after the World War II were labour migrants mainly from Nordic and other European countries. For the most part, these migrants were driven by economic factors. On recommendation from the Labour Organization of Sweden, admission legislation was changed at the end of the 1960s, when a relatively liberal policy was replaced by a more restrictive policy, mainly towards non-Nordic labour migrants.

Unaffected by the change in admission policy, and based on a relatively greater willingness to grant asylum, together with a liberal family reunification policy, most immigrants who arrived during the 1970s, and especially the 1980s and 1990s, were refugees from East European and non-European countries and tied movers from both labour migrants and refugees. Statistics reveal that tied movers and refugees both make up for 50% of those granted a residence permit in the last decades. The economic crisis of the early 1990s and the dramatic increase of asylum seekers during the same period paved the way for adjusting the refugee policy towards a more restrictive attitude, where temporary protection of asylum seekers replaced what formerly would have been the authorization of permanent residence permits.

The assimilation policy towards immigrants also changed, and since the mid-1970s, the integration policy of Sweden is based on cultural pluralism and guidelines of equality, freedom of choice and partnership. Integration into the labour market has been an important goal of the policy. The settlement policy implemented in the mid-1980s, directing refugees who gained a residence permit to a number of municipalities, and especially those with a favourable local labour market, can be seen as a way of reaching both these goals.

Whereas the labour migrants adjusted relatively well into the labour market and the concentration in settlements of various immigrant groups were seen as a way of retaining certain cultural elements of these groups, the economic integration of immigrants in general declined gradually and for some groups deteriorated dramatically, resulting in an increase of spatial concentration for some immigrant groups.

In this sense, integration policies in Sweden have not been effective during the last decades. The "multicultural" society does exist in Sweden, but only when we look at

the number of foreign-born relative to native-born. Furthermore, when it comes to the most prominent measure of integration, employment integration, it becomes clear that large groups of immigrants are experiencing hard times in Sweden.

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Note

[1] No official statistics are available on dual citizenship.