

Sweden

Sweden, the biggest country in Scandinavia with a population of just over nine million people, is today a multicultural society. In recent years the influx of asylum-seekers and refugees, family members of migrants already resident in the country, as well as foreign students has reached record levels. In addition, European Union (EU) citizens, Norwegians and Icelanders are free to settle in Sweden and look for work. Only recently the government also made immigration easier for workers from non-EU states. In 2007 there were more than 1.2 million people living in Sweden who were born in another country – 13.7 per cent of the total population.¹

Alongside its comparatively open immigration policy, the country has an integration policy that, despite some defects, changing political priorities and some unresolved challenges, is deemed a success and even exemplary by the international community; this is underscored by the presence of immigrants in public life, symbolising the openness of the multicultural society. One example is the presence of high-level politicians with a



Background Information

Capital: Stockholm

Official languages: Swedish (and regional languages Finnish, Tornedalfinnish and Sami)

Area: 450,295 km²

Population (2009): 9,269,986

Population density (2009): 23 inhabitants per km²

Population growth (2007): 0.76%

Foreign-born population as percentage of total population (2008): 13.4%

Labour force participation rate (2007): 71.2% (15 - to 74-years old)

Percentage of foreign born in the labour force (2008): 14.7% (15- to 74-years old)

Unemployment rate: 6.2% (2008), 6.1% (2007), 7.1% (2006), 7.8% (2005)

Religions: 74.3% Lutheran christians, 25.7% other religions and atheists

Source: Statistiska Centralbyrån.

migration background. In the present centre-right government led by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, for example, Burundi-born Minister Nyamko Sabuni is responsible for integration. The previous social democratic government, too, included a cabinet minister from an immigrant family, the Minister for Schools, Ibrahim Baylan.²

By comparison with the rest of Europe, Sweden takes in many refugees and actively encourages new labour migrants, and was also the only EU country to immediately open its doors to citizens from the EU accession countries of 2004 and 2007. These facts are accepted and endorsed or at least tolerated by the majority of the population.

Historical development of migration

Sweden has existed within its present territorial boundaries since 1905. Prior to that, Sweden and Norway had been united under one monarch. The year of the dissolution of the union marked the end of the decline of Sweden from the status of major European empire with control over wide areas of Scandinavia as well as of the Baltic, Russia and Germany. At the time of the empire, which flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries, there had already been migration movements. In those days, Sweden was a multilingual, religious and ethnically heterogeneous kingdom, whose leaders supported immigration and

regarded emigration as a loss.³ Immigrants with capital and specialist skills were especially welcome; they contributed to making Sweden an important political power in Europe. During the period when Sweden was a major power, seventeen languages were spoken domestically. The dissolution of the empires of Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland in the early 19th century created four nation states in Northern Europe that still exist today. A dominant majority population and a Lutheran state church emerged in each of the four states. Contrary to the period of the great powers, however, a sense of nationality based on ethnicity emerged, with each ethnic group resorting to its own history and language.

During the rapid industrialisation of the early 20th century, waves of emigrants headed for the even faster-growing economies of Denmark and Norway, as well as America.

Social unrest, political conflicts and espionage between the warring powers during the First World War prompted the Nordic countries to tighten control of migratory movements, among other means by way of visa regulations and the creation of central state immigration authorities and registers of foreigners. About 1917 the Scandinavian countries took in refugees from the former Tsarist Empire and organised summer vacations for children from the territories of the former Habsburg monarchy. During the Second World War, in which Sweden was not directly involved, Sweden became a place of refuge for about 180,000 refugees, in particular from Finland, Norway, Estonia, Denmark and Germany.

In 1954, following the formation of the "Nordic Council", Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland introduced a common labour market. Similar to the freedom of movement enjoyed by citizens of the more recently established EU, citizens of the northern European countries wishing to work in a Nordic partner country have since been able to move freely across internal borders without a work or residence permit. The agreement was also later joined by Finland. By then Sweden had developed into the North's leading economic and industrial nation. In the 1960s and early 1970s, labour migrants were actively recruited, first in the Netherlands, West Germany, Italy, Austria, Belgium and Greece, and later also in Yugoslavia and Turkey. Many

migrants also came from Finland, which at that time was less prosperous than Sweden. Unlike countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, the Swedish government did not pursue a "guest worker policy", but rather assumed from the outset that the immigrant workers would stay and become integrated.

In 1972/73 the recruitment of foreign workers was stopped as the economy slowed. Even after that, however, migratory movements continued. Instead of recruited workers, immigrants since then have mostly arrived to join relatives already resident in Sweden or else as refugees.⁴ Since joining the European Union in 1995, the principle of freedom of movement for EU citizens has also applied to Sweden. In addition, Sweden has acceded to the Schengen Agreement, thus abolishing controls at borders with other signatories.

Current trends

In 2008 when 101,171 people migrated to Sweden, immigration reached record levels. This figure includes all persons noted in the Swedish municipal register in 2008 as "immigrated". As a rule, all persons wishing to remain in Sweden for a lengthy period are registered. The same does not apply to tourists, seasonal labourers or other workers whose stay is only brief and temporary. The biggest group among the 2008 immigrants were in fact Swedish citizens who had previously been residing abroad, but there were also many Iraqis as well as citizens of neighbouring Nordic countries and of Poland.

Emigration from Sweden in 2008 and 2007, at a level of more than 45,000 persons each year, was also on par with numbers last seen during the great wave of emigration to America at the beginning of the 20th century. Fifty-four per cent of those who emigrated during 2007 were people who had previously migrated to Sweden. The remaining 46 per cent were Swedes, the majority of whom emigrated to Norway, Denmark and Finland.

Today, family reunification is the most common cause of migration among immigrants from countries outside the Nordic Council and the EU. Such persons often are family members of people who have been admitted as refugees. This is clearly apparent in the examples of Iraq and Somalia as countries of origin: of the 33,184 people who came to Sweden in 2008 as family members, 8,215 were Iraqi and 3,548 Somali citizens. Around two thirds of all residence permits granted on the grounds of family reunification concerned so-called "newly established relationships": Swedish citizens or foreigners resident in Sweden marrying a person of foreign nationality, who then acquires the right to permanent residency. In the remaining two thirds of cases a family relationship already existed before migration.

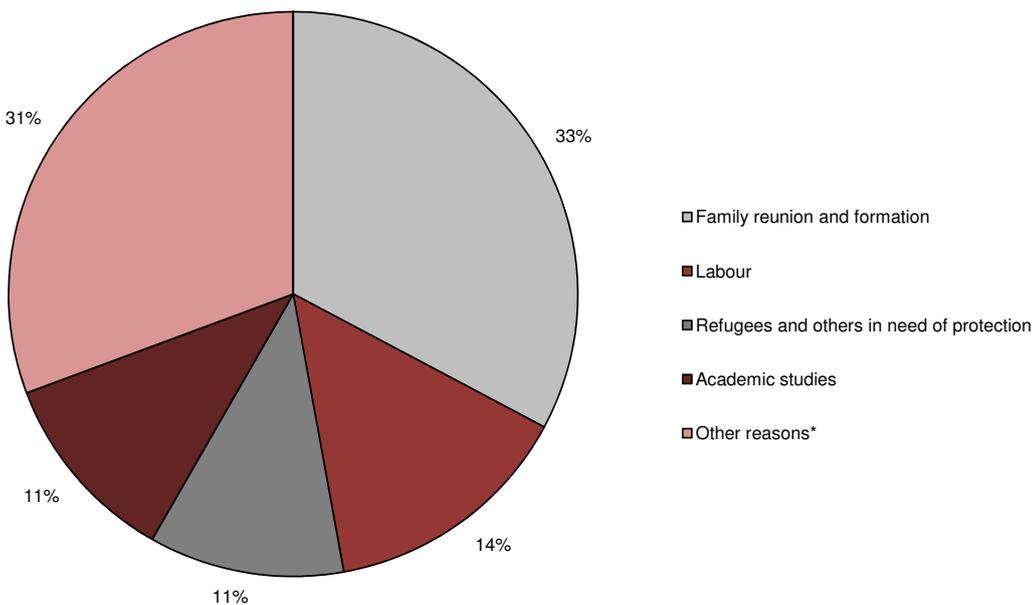
Alongside the family members of non-EU immigrants, persons from EU countries and countries within the European Economic Area (EEA)⁵ are an important immigrant group. The biggest group among the EU and EEA citizens in 2008 were Poles, followed by Germans, Romanians, the Dutch and the French.

The EU enlargement in May 2004 had an immediate impact on Sweden. Sweden was one of the few countries of the "old" EU not to put any transitional arrangements to limit the free

Table 1: Immigration 2008 by country of origin

Sweden (returnee)	17,853
Iraq	12,103
Nordic neighbouring countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland)	9,251
Poland	6,970
Somalia	4,064
Germany	3,405
Thailand	3,060
China	2,677
Romania	2,544
Serbia	1,791
Other	37,453
Total	101,171

Source: Statistika Centralbyrån.

Figure 1: Immigration 2008 by reason of granting the residence permit

Source: Migrationsverket.

Comment: short stays, i.e. temporary stays of asylum-seekers or seasonal labour, are not documented. "Other reasons" means, among other things, returning Swedish citizens, EU citizens and citizens of the Nordic neighbouring countries.

movement of citizens of the "new" states into effect. Contrary to Germany or Austria, for example, people from the new member countries were immediately able to travel to Sweden and work there without first needing to apply for a work permit. In the year of the enlargement, Polish immigrants already made up the largest group within the category of EU and EEA citizens. Fears expressed by Göran Persson, the Prime Minister of Sweden at the time, that without restrictions on the right to free movement Sweden would become a victim of "social tourism", have meanwhile proved unfounded. Most EU immigrants came as workers or service providers. There was no evidence that the new EU citizens were placing excessive demands on social services.⁶ In the light of this experience, Sweden introduced no restrictions when Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007. That expansion once again resulted in a conspicuous increase in immigration, particularly from Romania. However, this was still considerably less extensive than the influx of Polish citizens had been in 2004.⁷

Foreign students also make up a significant proportion of new immigrants. In total around seven per cent of students currently enrolled at Swedish universities and colleges come from abroad. In the 2006/2007 academic year this amounted to about 29,700 foreign students. Student migration has long been encouraged by the fact that Swedish universities have not demanded fees from either domestic or foreign students. In late 2009 however, the government in Stockholm announced that students from abroad will have to pay for university studies in Sweden from the winter semester 2011 onwards.

Labour immigration from countries outside the European Union hovers, in terms of numbers, roughly around the same level as the immigration of students. In 2008 a total of 14,513 labour migrants from third countries were granted a residence permit. Most of these came from Thailand (3,985), India (2,393)

and China (1,976).⁸ Thai citizens are a particularly strong group among labour migrants because they come to Northern Sweden in late summer each year to work as seasonal labourers picking cranberries and cloudberries, prized as a delicacy. After a few weeks, at the end of the picking season, they always leave again.

Immigration policy

The Swedish Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*) is responsible for regulating immigration to Sweden. It makes the decisions about, among other things, applications for a residence permit as a labour migrant, applications for naturalisation and also applications for asylum made by refugees.

The central authority has offices in Norrköping, Solna near Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and elsewhere and reports to the Swedish Migration Minister.

On 15 December 2008, following several years of preparation and negotiation, new regulations came into force in Sweden concerning the immigration of workers from non-EU states. Most importantly, labour immigration is now almost fully dependant on the needs of Swedish employers; the controlling powers of government agencies are severely restricted and the labour market is open to workers of all skill levels. The Swedish Public Employment Service no longer carries out checks to establish whether the immigration of foreign workers is economically necessary. If an employer has a vacancy available but is unable to find a suitable candidate inside Sweden, they are first obliged to advertise the vacancy publicly through the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*). This agency also sees to the publication of the advertisement in the EU job mobility portal EURES. If once again there is no response, the employer may, according to the new rules, advertise for an applicant from any country in the world. All the employer has to do is prove to the migration authorities that the vacancy has, in fact, been advertised for a period of at least ten days throughout the EU. In this way the principle of giving priority to Swedish job-seekers and EU citizens is respected.

The *Migrationsverket* next approves the recruitment of a third-country national and the trade union responsible for this field of work is given the opportunity to state an opinion on the terms of employment. The terms must be based on the applicable collective agreements, but the trade unions may not stop the appointment of a foreign candidate in case of breaches of the collective terms. The employer then offers the foreign applicant a contract. Armed with this offer of employment, the applicant next registers with the *Migrationsverket* and is given a residence and work permit for two years with the possibil-

ity of an extension. After one extension, in other words after spending four years in Sweden, a permanent residence permit may be granted. The foreign employee is then also free to change employers and, if applicable, migrate to another EU country.

The educational status of applicants is not taken into consideration with the new rules. Workers with low skills or even none at all may immigrate, if employers have the relevant vacancies. Economically-motivated migrants are given access to the same social rights as the rest of the country's population. Labour migrants may also bring their spouses with them from the outset and these are also given free access to the labour market.⁹ Another special feature is that Sweden now dovetails the immigration of asylum-seekers with labour migration. Asylum-seekers whose applications have been refused may look for a job in Sweden within a certain time period before having to leave the country and, if they are successful, apply for admission as labour migrants.¹⁰

The extensive reform of immigration legislation is caused by the diagnosis that in certain sectors the Swedish economy cannot fill vacancies since there is a lack of personnel on the Swedish labour market. Furthermore, the government observes that the population is ageing and that – just as in other EU countries – an ever-decreasing number of people of working age are obliged to support an ever-increasing number of pensioners. Especially in rural areas in central and northern Sweden, some municipalities are additionally reliant upon recruiting migrants specifically in order to counteract the negative impact of the population migrating to the cities.¹¹

Table 2: Residence and work permits granted to third country nationals on the basis of the new labour migration law (1.1.-1.6.2009)

Agricultural and forestry workers	2,667
Computer experts	882
Catering employees	302
Civil engineers, architects	232
Engineers and technicians	172
Gardeners	126
Construction workers and craftsmen	111
Other	974
Total	5,466

Quelle: Migrationsverket.

Between January and May 2009 the *Migrationsverket* received 7,560 applications for residence and work permits made on the basis of the new regulations. Up to and including April, India, China and Ukraine were the main countries of origin of foreign applicants. The most significant professional groups were computer specialists, caterers and engineers. Rejected asylum-seekers were the source of 532 applications. In May the numerical proportions changed dramatically as 2,667 seasonal workers applied for a work permit. Most of these were berry-pickers from Thailand.¹²

The immigrant population

Around 1,227,770 people, or about 13.7 per cent of the Swedish population, were born abroad. A large number of them come from neighbouring Nordic countries. However, the number of immigrants from other European countries and from Asia has grown significantly. Sweden today is a multicultural country. In 1970 the proportion of people born abroad in relation to the total population was only half what it is today.¹³

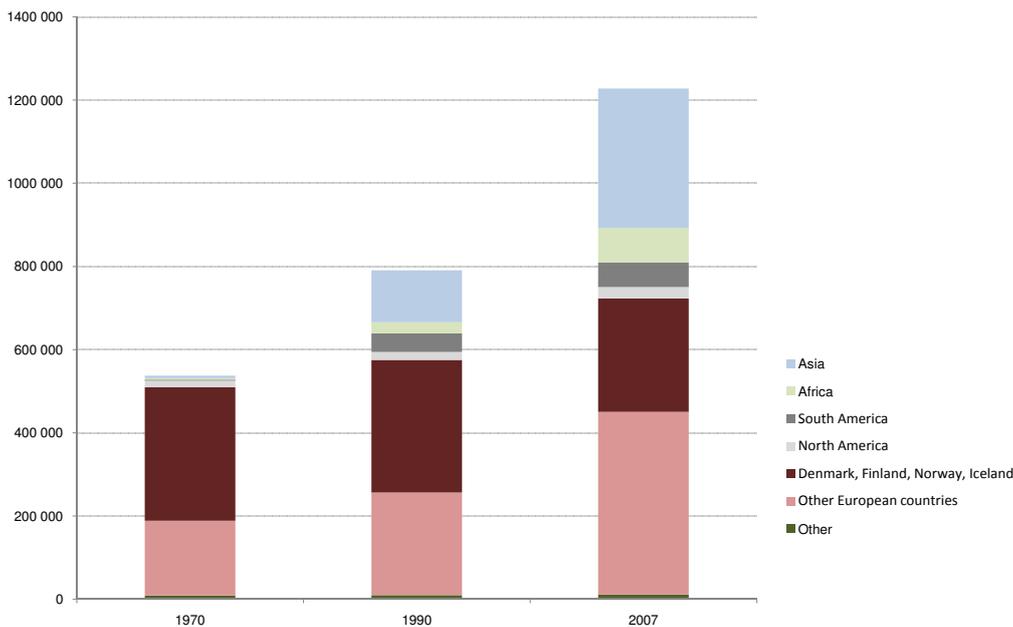
Most immigrants live in and around the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, with smaller numbers in Örebro, Uppsala, Jönköping, Kalmar and Södertälje. By contrast, the proportion of immigrants on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, as well as in the northwestern and northern provinces of Sweden, is relatively small, although there are immigrants and refugees even in the extreme north, often running pizzerias or kiosks.

Integration policy

Swedish integration policy is internationally regarded both as one of the most ambitious and as one of the most successful.¹⁴ The Scandinavian welfare state boasts a large public sector offering comprehensive social security systems. These are available to all inhabitants. Equality, solidarity, cooperation and consensus are core components of this system, which has, however, come under scrutiny many times in recent years.

In the 1960s and 70s immigrants had no difficulty finding jobs in Sweden. Sometimes industry provided them with accommodation and the employee organisations helped with integration. In school, children from foreign families had the right to be taught in their mother tongue for a certain number of hours a week. Municipal libraries were also given the financial means to purchase lexicons, newspapers and books in the major immigrant languages.¹⁵ Sweden was at that time markedly influenced by social democratic thought, and assumed that immigrants would stay. As early as 1968, the egalitarian approach already outlined was anchored in the first governmental bill about immigrant policy objectives: immigrants were to have the opportunity to achieve the same living standards as the rest of the population.¹⁶ With regard to integration, the government and parliament initially neither endorsed a policy of assimilation nor a strategy to specially promote differing immigrant cultures. It was argued that immigrants were to have the right to maintain the language and culture of their country of origin, but that the state needed not actively support this; rather, the migrants themselves were able to attend to the matter.¹⁷ This was the start of Sweden's development into a multicultural state. In 1975 the government granted foreigners the active and passive right to vote in municipal and provincial parliament elections.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the influx of refugees and family members migrating to Sweden for reunification was growing, the image of generosity and equality that had developed over the years was increasingly felt to be a burden. The government felt obliged to demonstrate that Sweden was able to restrict immigration. Stricter immigration control was now

Figure 2: Persons born abroad by continent of origin 2008

Source: Statistiska Centralbyrån 2009.

deemed a prerequisite if integration was to continue to work. In line with the restrictions in asylum and immigration legislation introduced at the time, the strategy adopted with regard to integration was also changed; whereas previously multiculturalism had been stressed and at times fostered by the state, the policy was considered to have overly accentuated cultural differences between Swedes and immigrants, thereby gradually reinforcing mental and social boundaries between an “us” (the Swedes) and a “them” (the immigrants). The new policy was intended, instead, to play down such differences, stress similarities and focus on social cohesion.¹⁸ As a result, asylum-seekers recognised in Sweden as refugees or granted a residence permit for humanitarian reasons must today attend an obligatory “Swedish for Immigrants” course offered and paid for by the municipality that takes them in. The course not only aims to teach the Swedish language but to provide knowledge and understanding of the social system and Swedish traditions. The course concludes with an examination, which is deemed an important requirement for finding a job. The policy considers the best form of integration into Swedish society to be rapid integration into the labour market. Education and training, as well as active job placement, are therefore of the utmost priority in today’s integration policy.

To prevent disproportionate concentrations of the immigrant population in certain places, the government is also attempting to disperse newly arrived asylum-seekers and recognised refugees throughout the country under what is known as the “All Sweden” policy (see also *Asylum and refugees*). This is also intended to counteract the recognisable trend in more remote regions, especially in central and northern Sweden, towards ageing and the migration of the young population to the cities.

In the course of the last few years, however, the “All Sweden” policy has brought about a dilemma: municipalities in regions suffering from emigration and ageing declared their readi-

ness to take in asylum-seekers and refugees; however, there was often a shortage of job vacancies in such places, with the result that migrants accommodated there often tried to move on to bigger cities as quickly as possible. In cities such as Gothenburg, Malmö or Stockholm there may indeed be more jobs available, but there is limited low-cost housing, leading to an increased concentration of migrants crowded into the suburbs, which contributes to social tension. Highrise buildings in the suburbs of Stockholm and other cities are symbolic of this situation, having been erected between 1965 and 1975 under the so-called “Million Programme” (*Miljonprogrammet*). Today these areas are often run-down. As the rent, however, is comparatively reasonable, many socially disadvantaged

groups live there, such as migrants, low-income single parents and poor pensioners. Social scientists speak of this as marginalisation and social segregation.¹⁹ The term marginalisation not only refers to the living conditions but also to the foreign population’s poorer integration in the labour market. In 2005 around 76 per cent of all inhabitants born in Sweden and aged between 16 and 64 were in paid employment, but only 62 per cent of those born abroad.

Citizenship

Since 2001 Sweden has had a fairly liberal law on citizenship based both on elements of the right to nationality based on parentage and on the principle of birthright citizenship. According to the principle of the right to citizenship based on parentage (*ius sanguinis*) it is the parents’ citizenship that is decisive as to which citizenship is conferred upon the child at birth. If a Swedish woman gives birth to a child, then that child automatically receives Swedish citizenship. If a Swedish man has a child by a foreign woman, then that child, too, is automatically a Swede, providing the child is born inside Sweden or the parents are married.

In addition to *ius sanguinis*, currently there are strong elements of the principle of birthright citizenship (*ius soli*) as well as the possibility of acquiring citizenship by naturalization.²⁰ Any foreigner resident in Sweden for at least five years who is of full legal age, possesses a permanent residence permit and has committed no criminal act can apply for Swedish citizenship. Language skills or special knowledge of the state and social systems are not required. There are even exceptions applicable to the minimum residence period of five years: stateless persons or recognised refugees can apply for Swedish citizenship after four years in Sweden. Danes, Finns, Icelanders and Norwegians

can even become Swedes after two years of residence.²¹ Many municipalities today hold celebratory “citizenship ceremonies” on the Swedish national day.

Whereas the earlier Swedish law did not permit dual citizenships, since 2001 foreigners have been able to retain their former citizenship when acquiring Swedish citizenship. In the past five years (2004–2008) more than 120,000 foreigners have been naturalised in Sweden.²²

Asylum and refugees

Right up until the early 1980s the number of asylum-seekers in Sweden was small, at about 5,000 applicants per year. After 1985, however, the number of applications increased, reaching a peak in 1992 with about 84,000 asylum-seekers, mostly attributable to the war in the former Yugoslavia.

In light of this increase, the influx of asylum-seekers became a highly politicised topic in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For the first time, the government developed a system for dispersing asylum-seekers within the country. At first, refugees were accommodated in about 60 of Sweden’s 284 municipalities, while almost all of the municipalities were supposed to become involved in taking in refugees at a later date. This elicited a strong negative response among the local populations in some municipalities. Today the municipality of Sjöbo in the south of the country is still renowned throughout all Sweden. There, in 1988, a local referendum was held wherein the great majority of the population supported the municipal council’s refusal to participate in the national refugee admission programme.²³ In 1991 the populist right-wing “New Democracy” (*Ny Demokrati*) party succeeded in gaining representation in the Swedish parliament (*riksdag*).²⁴ There were also attacks by radical right-wing groups on mosques and the homes of asylum-seekers. This shattered the self-image held by many Swedes of an open and tolerant country.²⁵

The government reacted to all these developments with an attempt to make it more difficult for asylum-seekers to enter Sweden, such as by extending visa restrictions. In addition, however, there were awareness-raising campaigns aimed at curbing racism and xenophobia. After 1992 the numbers of newly arrived asylum-seekers fell rapidly. In 2006 and 2007, however, Sweden once again became an important destination country for asylum-seekers. In 2007, the *Migrationsverket* registered a total of 36,207 applications for asylum, more than any other EU state. Although Germany has nine times as many inhabitants as Sweden, there were only half the number of asy-

lum-seekers.²⁶ Around 48 per cent of asylum-seekers whose applications were considered by the *Migrationsverket* during the course of 2007 were granted a residence permit. For comparison, the protection rate in Germany in the year 2007 was 27.5 per cent.²⁷

The high figures experienced by Sweden can be explained above all by a significant increase in the flow of refugees from Iraq since 2006. Around half of the applications for asylum registered in 2007 came from Iraqis. The authorities granted about 72 per cent of them a residence permit as refugees. As a result, Sweden took in more Iraqi refugees than all the other industrialised countries in Europe and the Americas combined. In 2008, however, due to the large number of immigrants, the Migration Board changed its “liberal” line, classifying certain parts of Iraq as safe “internal flight alternatives” and rejecting more Iraqi refugees. This had an immediate effect on migration flows; the proportion of Iraqi refugees among the overall number of asylum-seekers fell to a quarter.

For all that, Iraq still remains at the top of the list of countries from which refugees in Sweden originate. The second most common country of origin in 2008, with about 14 per cent of all asylum applications, was Somalia. Other countries such as Palestine, Kosovo, Serbia, Russia and Eritrea comprised a comparatively small portion with about 4 per cent of asylum applications each. Overall, the number of asylum-seekers in Sweden in 2008 was significantly smaller than in 2007, and the number of protected immigrants, in other words, those recognised by the *Migrationsverket* as having refugee status or granted a residence permit for humanitarian reasons, halved between 2007 and 2008; instead of 48 per cent, only 24 per cent of applicants for asylum received a positive response.

Comparative analysis of asylum applications reveals another striking feature; the number of unaccompanied minors among asylum-seekers is fairly high. Between 2004 and 2008

Figure 3: Trend in number of applications for asylum (approx. 2000 – 2008)



Source: Migrationsverket.

the number of minors arriving in Sweden without parents or guardians almost quadrupled. In 2008, 1,510 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in Sweden, most of them from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. In Germany during the same period, just 763 unaccompanied asylum-seekers younger than 18 were registered.²⁸

The system for dispersing refugees and for their acceptance in municipalities has been functioning, broadly speaking, since the 1980s. After their arrival and applying for asylum, most asylum-seekers are housed for a short while in collective accommodation run by the Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*). While the *Migrationsverket* checks the grounds for asylum, asylum-seekers may either stay with relatives or friends, or else they will be assigned accommodation. The receiving municipalities decide for themselves whether they wish to take in asylum-seekers, and, if so, how many each year. They provide communal apartments rented and paid for by the *Migrationsverket*. In addition to accommodation, the responsible municipalities also provide “Swedish for Immigrants” courses and help arrange internships or jobs.

On the one hand, this system ensures wide distribution of the financial burdens associated with taking in asylum-seekers and refugees among Swedish municipalities from the south through to the farthest north of the country. On the other hand, however, it also provides fuel for recurrent political conflicts. When the admission of asylum-seekers from Iraq reached its peak in 2006 and 2007, many municipalities refused to take in additional refugees. They therefore remained for longer than necessary in apartments provided for asylum-seekers or in the collective accommodation run by the *Migrationsverket*. Those cities too where many Iraqis were already living were subjected to a further large increase in immigrant numbers, since many Iraqis moved to their fellow countrymen already resident in these cities. In 2007, the industrial town of Södertälje to the south of Stockholm, with a population of about 83,000, took in a total of 1,268 Iraqis - more than the USA in the same year. Moreover, while the multicultural, but economically weak, Stockholm suburb of Botkyrka provided accommodation for 360 newly arrived Iraqi refugees, municipalities in rich suburbs with a low number of foreigners declared their willingness to take in only a two-digit number of refugees. There have also been similar conflicts in recent years with regard to taking in refugee minors who require more care than adults and are therefore a larger financial burden on the municipalities. In autumn 2007, the migration authorities took the remarkable step of publishing a “black list” of municipalities that were not participating in the acceptance of unaccompanied children and young people. This *name and shame* strategy was intended to increase the moral pressure on the most reluctant municipal administrators.²⁹

In addition to those who come to Sweden and apply for asylum there, since 1950 Sweden has also taken in quota refugees in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Members of the *Migrationsverket* travel to countries where asylum-seekers have sought temporary refuge and, in collaboration with the UNHCR, select people who are deemed to have a special need for protection. In recent years this has enabled between 1,200 and 1,900 refugees per year from crisis regions to resettle in Sweden.³⁰

Irregular migration

It is as difficult to estimate the extent of irregular migration to Sweden as it is for other countries. Estimates currently in circulation are mostly based on statistics concerning the number of expulsion orders pending with the Swedish police and imposed by the *Migrationsverket* on rejected asylum-seekers and persons with expired residence permits. In June 2005 the police had yet to enforce about 16,000 such orders that had for various reasons not yet been executed.³¹ The numbers, however, provide only a rough indication.

In general, it can be assumed that the number of irregular migrants in Sweden is smaller than in central or south European countries. This is attributable to Sweden’s somewhat remote geographic position as well as the fact that Swedish society has strict legal regulations, leaving very little room for an irregular stay.³² The Scandinavian welfare state stands out from other nations by, among other things, having a comprehensive and detailed record of the population. All citizens and legal immigrants have a personal identification number comprising the date of birth and four further digits that clearly identifies each person in the municipal tax registers.³³ Without such a number it is not possible to open a bank account, receive social security benefits or claim other social services, or apply for a telephone line. This makes it difficult to live without residence status. In addition, the high degree of unionisation among Swedish workers makes it difficult for an irregular worker to remain undetected.

In 2005, parliament reformed Swedish asylum law; thereby bringing Sweden in line with the EU asylum guidelines that had entered into force in previous years. A measure was introduced for regularising rejected asylum-seekers and people living in Sweden for some years under a deportation order that had not yet been carried out. Those concerned were given the right to submit a new application for asylum by March 2006. The Migration Board was required to apply particularly flexible criteria when assessing these follow-up applications. According to the *Migrationsverket*, about 30,000 applications were submitted, of which just 60 per cent were approved. The approval right was as high as 96 per cent for applicants from countries to which it was impossible to carry out deportations.³⁴

Future challenges

In general, despite sporadic situations of crisis, public discourse in Sweden concerning migration and integration is characterised by a high degree of political correctness. Whenever, for example, the mass media report on criminal offences, they do not give any indication as to the place of origin or nationality of the alleged perpetrator until the person has been convicted or at least until official charges have been preferred. Extreme right-wing parties that openly stir up public opinion against the government’s immigration and integration policy are – unlike in Denmark, Norway and recently also Finland – as yet only marginal phenomena and far removed from being leaders of opinion. There is, however, evidence that the radical right-wing “Sweden Democrats” (*Sverigedemokraterna*) are gaining

increasing support among the electorate. In advance of the 2009 European election it was widely expected that the party might well gain representation in the European Parliament. However, in the end it received just 3.3 per cent of the votes. In the last parliamentary elections the Sweden Democrats also failed to clear the four per cent hurdle to gain a seat in the national parliament, although they were well supported in some southern Swedish constituencies, thereby triggering headlines and debate. In addition, there is in Sweden a (neo-) Nazi movement that, despite being small in numbers, is particularly active and radical and has in the past committed a spate of attacks and murders on dissenters, migrants, homosexuals and trade unionists.

In order to limit the move towards the radical right and extremists, the established parties are attempting to bolster the high levels of immigration with a functioning integration policy and to correct existing deficiencies. The situation is particularly urgent in the so-called “problem suburbs” of the bigger cities. It is true that the social conditions there are still far better than those in the suburbs of Paris. There is, however, considerable unemployment, lack of prospects and hopelessness among the young people in particular and this repeatedly spills over into attacks on the police, vandalism and arson. The current centre-right government hopes to improve the situation by employing more teachers at primary and secondary schools in city suburbs. Ms Nyamko Sabuni, Minister for Integration and Gender Equality, is also of the opinion that for many migrants it is not worthwhile taking on employment, as Swedish state benefits are too high. To break the “outsidership” of newly arrived immigrants, she wants to ensure that in future it will be more “worthwhile” for migrants to work. They are to be given incentives to accept jobs, including those in the low-pay sector. This line means a radical break with the earlier social democratic policy that focussed on equality and solidarity in the labour market and therefore invested above all in education and further education for disadvantaged population groups. Today it is accepted that certain categories of workers only have access to poorly-paid, low-skilled jobs. Shortly after coming into office in 2006, the current centre-right government took the decision to significantly reduce unemployment benefits with the aim of increasing the incentive to accept employment.³⁵ In addition, the policy is intended to ensure that it is easier for immigrants to have foreign vocational training and diplomas recognised in Sweden or, if applicable, to take shorter additional training courses in order to gain recognised academic or vocational qualifications and have better chances in the labour market.³⁶ Discrimination against immigrants in the awarding of jobs, in the housing market and in other areas of public life is also to be more vehemently combated by a new anti-discrimination law,³⁷ which came into force on 1 January 2009.³⁸

There have been intense debates about Islam, Muslims in Sweden and potential trends towards radicalisation, following the dispute over the Jyllands-Posten Mohammed cartoons in neighbouring Denmark in 2006 and a comparable case in Sweden in 2007 that stirred up less national and international attention. Among other actions, the government commissioned a study to establish whether to introduce a state-funded training programme for imams in order to increase the religious lead-

ers’ knowledge of the basic principles of Swedish society and help stem extremist teachings. However, the study came to the conclusion that a state training course was not a solution, partly because it contradicted the principle of Swedish confessional neutrality.³⁹

The global economic and financial crisis experienced in most other European countries has had an impact on Sweden, too, despite the economic boom of recent years and the fall in unemployment. Now, unemployment figures are rising and the Swedish currency is losing value. This poses a real threat to social cohesion in Sweden, especially against a backdrop of the decreasing importance of social democratic social policies since the 1980s – policies, which had aimed for a relatively equal distribution of incomes and a comprehensive social security system. Differences between rich and poor were already on the increase before the current crisis. The increasing polarisation of social strata could result in the somewhat cautiously expressed demands for stricter immigration control being heard until now, soon becoming much louder.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Cf. Statistiska Centralbyrån (2009).
- ² Many athletes, pop stars and other celebrities in Sweden also have a migration background. Top, internationally recognised athletes include the Gambian-born pole-vaulter Alhaji Jeng, the Somali long-distance runner Mustafa Mohamed and the professional footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who comes from a Bosnian family and was born in Malmö, South Sweden. The successes of the football club *Assyriska Föreningen*, founded by Assyrian immigrants and which occasionally plays in the first professional division of the Swedish football league, are followed and celebrated far beyond the country's borders. Among many other musicians, Timbuktu, a hip hop artist with African ancestors, and also Iranian-born Laleh enjoy considerable popularity. Further examples include authors, actors and entrepreneurs.
- ³ Cf. Kjeldstadli (2007).
- ⁴ Cf. Migrationsverket (2009a).
- ⁵ Apart from the EU countries, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein are also members of the EEA.
- ⁶ Cf. *Inga tecken på "social turism"*, in: Dagens Nyheter, 24 August 2004.
- ⁷ Cf. Wadensjö (2007).
- ⁸ Source: Migrationsverket.
- ⁹ Cf. Springfieldt (2009).
- ¹⁰ Cf. Migrationsverket (2009b).
- ¹¹ Cf., for example, Cvetkovic (2009).
- ¹² Cf. Migrationsverket (2009c).
- ¹³ See Statistiska Centralbyrån 2009, p. 102; and Hammar (2003), p. 238.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Hammar (2003), p. 238.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Benito (2007), p. 336.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Dahlström (2006), p. 16.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Dahlström (2006), p. 16 and Soininen (1999), p. 687.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Hammar (2003), pp. 244f.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Cvetkovic (2009), pp. 101f.
- ²⁰ Cf. Regeringskansliet (2000), p. 86.
- ²¹ Cf. Migrationsverket (2006), pp. 6-7.
- ²² Cf. Migrationsverket (2009a), p. 22.
- ²³ Cf. Norström, Eva (2004), p. 43.
- ²⁴ At the following election in 1994 *Ny Demokrati* only obtained about 1.2 per cent of the votes, thereby losing its parliamentary mandate.
- ²⁵ Cf. Geddes, Andrew (2003), pp. 110f.
- ²⁶ Cf. Migrationsverket (2009a), p. 10; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2008), pp. 27 and 29.
- ²⁷ The total protection rate is calculated as follows: The total of number of positive decisions (to accept asylum seekers as refugees, to grant temporary protection as refugee, or to state that removal is legally prohibited) is divided by the total number of decisions on such issues during the same period (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2009), p.48).
- ²⁸ Cf. Migrationsverket (2009a), p. 13; and Parusel (2009).
- ²⁹ Cf. *Hem för ensamma flyktingbarn stängs*, in: *Sydsvenskan*, 4 January 2008.
- ³⁰ Cf. Migrationsverket (no year), p. 2.
- ³¹ Cf. Khosravi (2006), pp. 291.
- ³² Cf. Geddes (2003), p. 112.
- ³³ A precondition to the issuing of a personal identification number is obligatory registration with the Tax Agency at the relevant municipality. Upon registration the following personal data are stored: name, age, sex, marital status, spouse and children below legal age (if applicable), town of birth, country of birth, nationality, date of immigration or emigration with country of origin and destination, current address. Municipal tax registers can be accessed by other government organisations.
- ³⁴ Cf. Migrationsverket (undated press release): *Resultat av den tillfälliga lagen om prövning av beslut om av- och utvisning*, Norrköping: Migrationsverket.
- ³⁵ Also cf. Parusel (2006), pp. 1436-1439.
- ³⁶ Cf. *"Vi satsar två miljarder på snabba integration"*, in: Dagens Nyheter, 19.09.08.
- ³⁷ *Diskrimineringslag*, Doc. No. SFS 2008: 567 dated 5 June 2009.

³⁸ The fact that there is a need for improvement in equality of opportunity has been boldly brought to the attention of the Swedish public on many occasions in recent years. The newspaper Dagens Nyheter, for example, had two students telephone companies to apply for vacancies. Both had exactly the same qualifications, but one called himself Fredrik, the other Rebin. Whereas Fredrik was invited to several interviews, Rebin – evidently solely due to the foreign-sounding name – was told "No, thank you" on each occasion. Cf. *Rebin? Nej, tack. Fredrik? Ja, välkommen!*, in: Dagens Nyheter, 5 September 2004. Reports on discrimination otherwise mostly cover the urban party, club and pub scene, where persons of foreign appearance are repeatedly shown the door. According to the new anti-discrimination law, such actions are prohibited and are subject to prosecution.

³⁹ Cf. Regeringskansliet (2009), pp. 102-109.

About the author:

Bernd Parusel has a degree in political science and is a research associate for the European Migration Network (EMN) at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Nuremberg.
E-Mail: Bernd.Parusel@bamf.bund.de

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